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BROKEN PLEDGES

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BROKEN PLEDGES

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AUTHOR'S NOTE



Most of the characters in this novel appeared
in its predecessor, *This Nettle, Danger*.



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I

IN a world full of menace, the personal troubles of an individual do not seem to be of much account—except to the individual. But John Barton, who, as some may know, happened to be London correspondent of the *New York Observer*, with special missions now and then to the storm centres of Europe, was more than a little annoyed when he received certain news disturbing to his life and plans in England.

It came to him over the telephone from his London office when he was dressing for dinner in his bedroom on the top floor of a thin, three-storeyed house in St. Leonard's Terrace, Chelsea, which he had taken on a three-years' lease with two years still to run. He had already wrecked two perfectly clean white ties in bad attempts at a butterfly bow when he heard the telephone bell ringing faintly in the hall below.

"Hell!" said John Barton, killing two annoyances with one oath.

In his white shirt, with his braces hanging over from a pair of black trousers creased to a knife-edge, he stood in front of a cracked mirror of the Queen Anne period which his sister Judy had picked up in the Caledonian Market and given him as a Christmas present. He was dissatisfied with his own image, which seemed to him like an advertisement for shaving soap in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and hardly likely to fascinate a flower of English beauty named Lady Anne Ede with whom he was to have the honour of dining that night with a group of friends in a Jermyn Street restaurant. She had refused to be fascinated by his manly charm and simple nature for quite a long time, he

remembered. He had travelled with her on the *Queen Mary*, beaten her at deck tennis, made love to her in London, Rome and Berlin, fallen for her desperately in her family's mediaeval house at Aldermere, and broken his heart over her when she had told him, kindly but firmly, that she could give him nothing but her friendship. Now he was going to have the honour of dining with her, and it seemed important to his self-respect that he should present himself with a perfectly good bow tie.

He would have to get his sister Judy to fix it after all. He could hear her singing in the room next to his own, where she was dressing for the same dinner. Since she had been engaged to an English eccentric named Robin Bramley, who painted pictures for the fun of the thing and proposed to starve her to death in a Knightsbridge mews, she had been as happy as a lark, he noticed. Now she called out to him through the half-open door.

"Telephone, John!"

"I'm not answering it," he told her. "I'm having hell's own trouble with this tie."

He heard her laugh, and then she slipped into his room looking rather alluring, he thought—though she called herself Plain Judy—in an evening frock of rose-coloured silk.

"It may be the office," she said.

He nodded.

"Yep. That's why I'm not answering. I don't want to miss our little dinner-party this evening by being sent out on some fool story not worth half a dozen lines by the time it reaches New York."

The telephone bell rang insistently. Mrs. Pockett downstairs—that pattern of English charladies—had either fallen asleep or gone out to the "pictures", which was her chief intellectual passion. Mrs. Barton, the mother of John and Judy, was attending one of her spiritual séances somewhere in Wimbledon, where she was in touch with distinguished ghosts.

"Better go down, John," said his sister. "I'll do that tie for you when you come up again."

"That's your New England conscience," he told her, striding out of the room and taking two stairs at a time to the little hall below.

"That you, Barton?" asked a voice on the telephone.

It was the voice of Mr. Franklin Speed, the head of the London office of the *New York Observer*.

"Speaking," said John. "Don't tell me you're giving me an assignment this evening! I have a very important dinner-party which needs my presence. I'll say it does!"

"It's a cablegram from Charlie Seligmann. He says the Chief wants you back in New York by the end of next month. He's sending you to Washington later on. I thought you might be interested to know."

John Barton breathed hard for a moment. His face had gone pale.

"Now, see here, Mr. Speed," he said rather grimly. "I thought I was doing rather well as a London correspondent. I had an idea the Chief liked my stuff from the European capitals, especially during the crisis last September. I don't want to leave England just yet. I've settled down here with my mother and sister, and taken a house on a three-years' lease, and anyhow, well—I like the English climate."

The English climate was at that moment wet, black and cold, with rain beating steadily on to the pavement of St. Leonard's Terrace and splashing from the wheels of taxis returning to their lair in Burton Court.

Down the telephone he heard Mr. Speed's dry laugh.

"Well, I've given you the message. No doubt it's unsettling for you. But it's no reflection on your work. On the contrary! Good night, Barton."

John Barton slapped down the receiver and went upstairs rather slowly, and thinking hard as he went, with three frowns on his forehead. He didn't want to leave England now. Anne Ede had come back from Germany. She had been rather sweet to him lately. He had seen something

in her eyes once or twice. Anyhow, he hated the idea of leaving this European drama which he had been watching as a daily chronicler of history. There was a lull at the moment, but it was all boiling underneath. He wanted to see it out. And he had fallen into the way of English life and made many friends. He had made a place for himself. Judy was going to get married to an Englishman. His mother had sold up her house in Massachusetts in order to come over here and be with him. It was an outrage, he thought, to jerk him back again to New York or Washington just when he was getting his roots down.

He loved this little old house and every crack in it and every creak of the stairs. He had come to England feeling very strange and rather hostile, quick to take offence, finding the English accent intolerably affected. Somehow it had caught hold of him—the beauty of the English countryside beyond the pavements' end, the glamour of London, the mind and manners of the English folk. Now and then he had seen behind their masks of reticence and reserve. He had been with them through a crisis when he and they had stared into dark pits of hurriedly dug trenches in their public parks and had been only an hour or two away from a war which would begin in the air with the drone of hostile bombers above the crowded roofs of this great city with its millions of peace-loving folk whose children might be the first victims.

He had seen the horror in their eyes, and it had been in his. He had shared their fear and he was not quite sure whether he had fully shared their courage. Some of his fellow correspondents had talked about panic, but he had seen nothing of it. He had seen only the resignation of a people steeling themselves to unimaginable horrors and knowing—that was the worst of it—that they were unprepared for it and weak in self-defence. Somehow that experience had drawn him closer to them, and given him a greater sense of sympathy with their leaders, who had made every possible concession—they called it the policy

of appeasement—to push back the grisly spectre and keep it at bay. He had gone rather far in putting up a defence for the Munich Agreement. He had taken off his hat to Mr. Chamberlain at the time. He had tried to tell the truth, as far as he could see it, in his dispatches to America. He had tried to be an interpreter of England to the United States. Now all that was going to be cut short by this recall. He felt very sore about it.

His sister Judy was startled by the look on his face when he came back into the bedroom. She was holding a new tie ready to make a butterfly bow in her best style.

“John! Did you meet a ghost in the hall?”

He laughed rather harshly.

“I certainly did. It grabbed me over the telephone. It woke me up from a pleasant dream—all this. Little old London. This quaint and draughty house which I’ve been in the habit of calling home. Europe with its picturesque customs and murderous ways. My English friends on the Left and Right. The sunny side of St. Leonard’s Terrace, when the sun shines once a year or so. Now it’s good-bye to all that.”

“Oh dear!” cried Judy. “What’s happened? Have the Germans declared war or something?”

John Barton laughed less harshly.

“Not that, yet. Don’t look so scared. I’ve been recalled, that’s all. Old man Lansing wants me in New York by the end of next month. The office has had a message through Charlie Seligmann.”

John’s sister Judy gave a little cry of dismay.

“Oh, John! That’s certainly too bad, and it’s a shame after all the good work you’ve been doing. It’s taking you away from your real mission in life.”

“That’s what I think,” agreed John. “But I’m also thinking that we’re going to be late for that dinner in Jermyn Street unless you do something about that white tie.”

She did something about his tie, and while she was

twisting it into shape he gave expression to his inmost emotions.

"I feel like hell about this, Judy. I shall hate leaving you behind to the tender mercies of an English humorist. And then there's mother and a thousand other things, and other people."

"Yes," said Judy. "All our friends. All these dear people who will soon be mine when I marry a perfectly good Englishman."

He grinned at her sentimentality.

"Don't forget you can keep your American nationality," he reminded her. "And if that guy Robin starts wife-beating or any other fine old English custom, send me a cablegram."

"I wish you were taking a wife back with you, John," said Judy.

She was sorry she had said that as soon as the words had left her lips. It was a reminder of his unfortunate love-affair with Anne Ede. John had been very much taken with her, but she had slipped away from him, though they had been meeting each other lately, and she was coming to dinner that evening with her brother David, who was on leave from the British Embassy in Berlin.

Judy was greatly surprised at her brother's answer.

"Maybe I will," he said darkly.

"John!" cried his sister. "What do you mean by that?"

John Barton evaded her eyes.

"If I have to leave England," he said mysteriously, "I'll take some of it with me—one of its garden flowers. If not, I shan't go—whatever old man Lansing says. Hi, woman, we're late!"

They drove through the rain to Jermyn Street, an American brother and sister who had been good companions in England, and, in that strange way which takes hold of Americans and Germans and Jews and all kinds of folk from foreign lands, had come to love the English scene and puppet play, including its rain-soaked streets, its odd

characters, its hidden genius, its ancient tradition which here and there survives, and something in its way of life, mysterious and inexplicable and very alluring.

"Gosh!" said John, stepping from the taxi and holding an umbrella over his sister Judy as the rain poured down. "I'll hate to leave England, like hell I will! I like its romance. I like its rain. How do you feel, Judy?"

"Perfectly good!" said Judy.

Well, that was natural. Beyond the door of the Ecu de France a good-looking man with dark eyebrows and a humorous mouth grabbed her as she came through and put one arm round her and kissed her behind the right ear. She was going to be married to him as soon as he earned a little more money for painting somebody's portrait, in case somebody wanted to be painted in a world unfavourable to Art. He was Mr. Robin Bramley, R.I., of Susan Street Mews, Knightsbridge.

"Plain Judy," he said. "You're looking like nothing on earth. I mean supernatural!"

It was the first time that Judy Barton, once of Massachusetts, had been embraced in a public restaurant by a good-looking man, or even an ugly one. She blushed furiously, but was quite good-natured about it.

II

"WE'RE a bit late," said John, looking across the restaurant where most of the tables were already crowded by chattering groups whose voices mingled into a curious concerto reminiscent of the parrot house at the Zoo. He couldn't see Anne Ede or her handsome brother David, whom he had last met in Berlin, where this young man had been sent after an unfortunate love-affair with a little Italian lady in Rome, somewhat jeopardizing his diplomatic career.

"Oh, that's all right," said Robin Bramley cheerfully. "We expect the Americans to come in a little late, but we're charmed when they come."

Only a year ago, John Barton, a perfectly good American, would have resented this speech as an English gibe against the United States, but he had got over that, and knew there was no malice in the jest. Robin Bramley, his future brother-in-law, was an incurable leg-puller anyhow.

"Anne's over there," he added as he helped to take off Judy's cloak. "I think she must be looking her best to-night, because all the male animals in this restaurant—and she seems to know most of them—gaze at her with homage. David's paying for this dinner, by the way, so we can eat and drink as much as we like without doing sums in mental arithmetic at every mouthful."

Judy gave a little squeal of laughter at this humorist whose poverty she proposed to share.

"Robin," she said, "wait till we get to our own table."

He led her by the hand to a table at the far end where Anne Ede and her brother were in possession.

John Barton, American journalist, made his best bow to a young woman who had broken his heart several times

with an appalling cruelty of which she seemed to be unaware. As he held her hand for a moment he agreed with Robin Bramley that she was looking her best this evening in a white frock with a little filmy stuff about her bare shoulders. She looked, he thought, terribly beautiful.

"Good evening," he said with devotion. "I must apologize for being a little late. I was kept by a sudden message from the office."

"Good news?" she inquired, smiling at him in a friendly way.

"As far as I am concerned, the worst," he told her.

"Nothing the matter with President Roosevelt, I hope?"

"Something the matter with my young life," he told her.

"A blighted career!"

She gave him a quizzing look to see if he were serious and decided that he was only half serious.

"You know David," she said. "He has all the latest from Germany. Quite reassuring. No war just yet in spite of American prophecies."

"Fine," said John Barton with cheerful incredulity. "Any time limit?"

He shook hands with David Ede of the British Embassy in Berlin, that handsome young man who looked like one of Arthur's knights, *sans peur et sans reproche*.

"Things were quiet when I left," said David Ede with a faint smile. "But there's always the battle of words in the German and British Press."

"Well, don't let's start on the international situation," said Anne. "Let's talk about food."

"Lady," said Robin Bramley, "you've said a mouthful. What do we eat? Still more important, what do we drink?"

They put their heads together over the menu card. David was knowledgeable on the subject of French clarets and chose one which he thought would be good. Robin Bramley refused to be put off oysters as a good start for the serious work and proposed to be exotic in his choice of future dishes. Living in a mews on tinned foods and

stale crusts, he said, he wasn't going to spoil the opportunity of a Lucullus feast at somebody else's expense.

He gave Judy Barton a grim warning.

"Woman," he said, "when you come round to my slum and share a humble kipper with me, you'll look back to this dinner through the rosy mists of memory."

"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is," said Judy sententiously, "than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

Robin greeted this remark with mirth.

"There speaks the simple maid of Massachusetts. Fancy hearing such an old-fashioned sentiment across a restaurant table in Jermyn Street, crowded with gourmets who would be sick at the sight of a dinner of herbs."

Anne Ede smiled across the table at Judy Barton.

"When are you two babes going to get married?" she asked.

"When Robin's ship comes home," said Judy.

Anne laughed at this fairy tale.

"It's very brave of you, Judy," she said. "My cousin Robin will never be able to support a wife in any state of reasonable comfort or security."

"We believe in collective security," answered Judy with a flutter of eyelashes. "I dare say we shall help to support each other."

Robin Bramley seemed to think well of this answer and caught hold of Judy's hand across the table-cloth.

"Judy is always surprising me," he told the company. "Her wit and wisdom flash out suddenly, and make me blink by their brilliance. She hides her talent like an oyster conceals its pearl. Which reminds me, by Jove, that if I could find a pearl in one of these shells, Judy, we might get married tomorrow!"

He pretended to search his oysters for any precious pearl that might be hidden therein.

"No luck!" he reported presently. "I'll have to wait until some purple-faced mayor wants to be painted in his chain of office—unless Judy cares to risk life with a

pavement artist. I'm negotiating for a pitch at Hyde Park Corner."

"I'll risk almost anything," said Judy.

Anne raised her hand in salute.

"I like your spirit," she said. "Heroic! I wish I had half your pluck, Judy."

Judy blushed a little at this tribute.

"You can't make me believe," she declared, "that you haven't all the spirit necessary for any adventure in life which you thought worth while."

Robin agreed.

"Anne has the spirit of Queen Elizabeth," he announced. "I mean the red-headed virgin, not our present gracious lady, upon whom may God smile."

"Is that a compliment or an insult?" asked Anne quickly. "Don't drag in Queen Elizabeth when we're talking about marriage. I don't want to remain a barren stock all my life."

"Say, that's good news for the world," said John, with deep enthusiasm.

Anne met his eyes and coloured slightly with a moment's self-consciousness.

"I'm afraid we're all talking nonsense," she confessed.

"Let's go on talking it," said Robin. "It's the test of the civilized mind to talk nonsense when life is dark and full of peril. A pox on all jitterbugs, says Robin Goodchild."

They went on talking nonsense quite successfully for some time, and only David Ede, junior diplomat, remained a little aloof and silent, until John Barton caught his eye and tried to draw him out a little.

"The policy of appeasement doesn't seem to make much headway," he remarked. "Why doesn't Hitler follow it up by a few kind words?"

David Ede shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Speaking unofficially," he said, "my own view is that Hitler felt thwarted by the arrival of the gentleman with the umbrella. And he was rather shocked by the pacifist

spirit of his own people, who hailed Chamberlain as the angel of peace."

"Do the Nazis pay any attention to public opinion?" asked John. "Won't the German people have to think what they're told by Dr. Goebbels and die when they're wanted by Adolf Hitler?"

David Ede seemed to agree.

"Yes, German propaganda is fairly irresistible and Hitler still has the hero-worship of the younger crowd. Even moderate-minded Germans who thought the Munich Agreement might be the beginning of a new era of peace were disconcerted when England began to rearm immediately afterwards to the tune of thousands of millions. Then there's all the abuse of Chamberlain in the English Press and from the Opposition. From a German angle of vision it didn't look as though England wanted any friendly understanding or had any faith in Hitler's pledges."

"What value do you attach to them yourself?" asked John with a sceptical laugh.

Young Ede evaded a direct answer, as though remembering his diplomatic training.

"My ambassador still believes that Hitler is sincere in his wish for peace. He's convinced that his ambitions are limited to the racial theory. That is to say, he doesn't want to go beyond the German framework or play the Napoleonic game of conquest over other races in Europe. He has said so a score of times. One is bound to believe it. It's the cardinal principle of his faith and fanaticism."

"There seems to be some trouble brewing in Slovakia," said John Barton. "There's a fellow named Father Tisza who has appealed to Hitler. The Hungarians are getting restless."

He was unable to continue that topic. Anne Ede desired conversation with him.

"Tell me," she said, "what was that bad news you had this evening. Serious? Or your American sense of humour?"

"A personal tragedy," he told her. "I've been recalled to my native heath. Unless I can postpone sentence I shall have to depart from this fair and pleasant land. I feel terribly sore about it."

He was glad that Anne showed a certain sympathy with his distress. It warmed his heart—she had broken it more than once—when she became a little excited about it.

"Oh no, that's absurd! We can't let you go. We want you over here."

John was quite moved by this unexpected desire on her part to keep him in England.

"Well," he said, "it's nice to think I'll be missed in little old England. I must say that will soften the blow a little."

"What's all that?" asked Robin, who had been making Judy laugh at his side of the table.

"John Barton says he has been recalled," announced Anne. "The only American correspondent who has been fair and friendly to England. It simply can't be allowed."

"Oh, I wouldn't claim a monopoly," said John modestly, and slightly flushed by this high tribute from a beautiful lady.

"It's very sad for John," said Judy. "He has worked so hard and fallen in love with England."

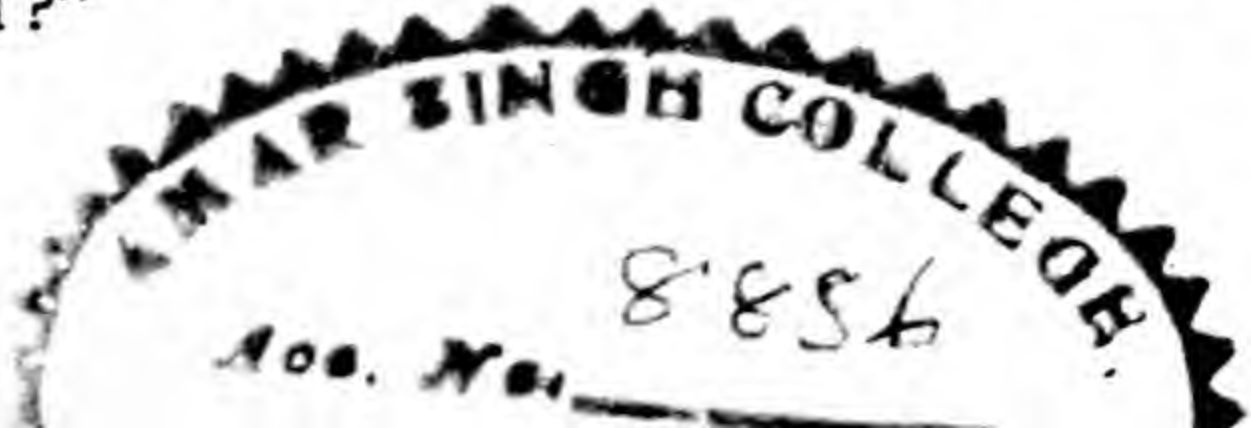
"I don't deny it," said John cordially. "At least with certain aspects of English beauty."

Anne was quite aware of his suggested meaning, which was in his eyes as well as in his words.

"I shall have to do something about it," she said. "It's a matter of international importance. We can't lose our little truth-teller and Judy's big brother, especially at a time when we need closer co-operation between England and the United States."

"Say, Anne," said John earnestly, "are you pulling my leg as usual, or do you mean any of that?"

"Do you doubt the kindness of my heart?" she asked. "Must the United States be left in darkness about what is happening in England?"



"That shan't happen," he told her.¹ "I shall go on serving as an interpreter on the other side. I might do something about those neutrality laws which keep us isolated. If I have to go back I shall be a propagandist for England and its charming people."

"You might put in a word for English artists, old man," said Robin Bramley. "If Mrs. Roosevelt would like her portrait painted for one of the second best bedrooms in the White House you might mention that you know the guy who would catch her sunny smile and immortalize it on a strip of canvas. Judy and I could do an American honeymoon."

"Why, that's an excellent idea!" exclaimed John with real enthusiasm.

He was enjoying this conversation. He liked this warmth of regret at the thought of his departure. He liked Anne's certificate of his good work—if she meant a word of it. It revived certain fantastic hopes. Supposing he could persuade her to go with him? Supposing she would take a chance on it after all, not wishing to remain for ever in the single state of Queen Elizabeth?

It was very annoying to him when this conversation, centering round his personality and private affliction, was interrupted by a page-boy belonging to the restaurant who came up to the table and spoke his name.

"Mr. Barton! Mr. John Barton!"

"Somebody wants you, John," said Judy.

"Wanted on the telephone," said the page-boy.

"Oh, hell!" said John, forgetting his manners for a moment.

It was, of course, the office. He had been fool enough to tell them that he was dining at the Ecu de France.

"Excuse me," he said, dropping his table-napkin, before striding across the restaurant and going to the telephone box.

III

HE was away for a few minutes. During that time two people crossed the restaurant and came up to Anne's table. They were two attractive-looking people—a young man and woman whom Anne introduced to Robin and Judy as Helmut and Elisabeth von Metsen.

"Dare we ask to join you at coffee?" asked the young man, who spoke English perfectly with hardly a trace of German accent.

"Why not?" asked Anne. "Did we quarrel about something? How long have you been in England? Why didn't you let me know? Elisabeth, you wretch!"

"We arrived yesterday, by air," said that charming-looking lady who was the sister of Helmut to whom John Barton had been very sulky in Berlin some little time ago as a jealous lover in the presence of a rival. Anne had been attracted by him. She had gone out to stay with them. There had been some idea in her mind that she wouldn't come back.

David Ede bent over the hand of Elisabeth von Metsen in his elegant way, and she raised it in the German style so that he might kiss it.

"We missed you in Berlin," she said. "When are you coming back?"

"Not for some time, I fear," he answered. "I hear rumours that I'm being sent to Washington, in time for the Royal visit."

"Then I shall go steerage to America," said Elisabeth with a kind of laughing adoration.

They took their places at the table, and the young German, a tall, square-shouldered fellow who might have

been mistaken for an English officer in evening clothes, accepted one of Robin's cigarettes.

"What is happening in England?" he asked with a friendly laugh. "My sister and I have been here only twenty-four hours, but we find we have come to a war-fevered land. Everyone we meet is talking anxiously about war. The whole nation is preparing for war. Your newspapers are full of appeals for volunteers against air-raids and incendiary bombs and poison gas. What is it all about? Who is the enemy?"

It was Robin Bramley who answered.

"We may have been misinformed, but some of us have been led to believe that there's been considerable activity in German munition factories for some years past. General Goering may have been misrepresented, but we seem to have read recent words of his boasting of the invincible and destructive might of the German Air Force. As simple islanders who have lost our island security because of bombing aeroplanes, we naturally feel a little nervous if we're quite defenceless. Perhaps it isn't quite sporting of us. *Cet animal est méchant. Quand on l'attaque il se défend.*"

"Yes, I see that. But who is going to attack you? Not Germany! In Germany we have no idea of attacking anyone. Did not Hitler tell Mr. Chamberlain at Munich that he has no further territorial claims? Why then all this sudden call to arms? Why all these millions poured out on armaments and all this war scare in the socialist press? In Germany, I assure you, there is the spirit of peace and good neighbourliness."

"Except for the Jews," said Anne rather coldly. "I have not forgotten what I saw in the Kurfürstendamm last November. It made my blood boil."

She had seen the smashing of Jewish shops and the brutalities to defenceless Jews. Their screaming had rung in her ears.

Elisabeth von Metsen gave a little cry of protest.

"Oh, Anne darling, don't remind us of that! We are

all ashamed of it. All decent Germans, of whom, as you know, there are many. Many many millions!"

"Yes," said Anne. "I know. But you don't do anything about it. Your leaders drive these poor wretches to suicide, steal their money and don't give them a dog's chance. The German people don't make any protest."

"They daren't!" said Elisabeth in a low voice. "They mustn't. In any case, the Jews asked for it all. It was our money they stole. They were parasites. Oh, I don't want to be unfair. There are many good Jews. But there were too many in Germany, and many of them bad."

"Why should you force them on us?" asked Anne. "London is becoming a new Jerusalem."

"Soon you will know what it means," said Helmut, with a little sinister laugh.

He put the subject away with a wave of the hand.

"It's an insoluble problem. I see its difficulty and its tragedy. I wish we had dealt with it in other ways. But now Elisabeth and I are glad to be in England again. I hope to be here for at least a year as correspondent of a Berlin paper which gives me good expenses. I hope we shall not be cold-shouldered by our English friends because of newspaper controversy, false news and foolish misunderstanding."

"The English are loyal to friends who are loyal to them," said Anne rather stiffly. She seemed to regret this stiffness, for suddenly she softened, and took the hand of Elisabeth von Metsen, who was sitting next to her.

"Elisabeth, my dear, you know what I think about it all. I want peace between Germany and England because both our people want peace and because I love you. You have been so kind to me. And David loves you too, don't you, David darling?"

David Ede blushed slightly at this sudden question, which seemed to embarrass him.

"Isn't that rather an emotional way of putting it? Certainly I'm charmed to see Elisabeth again in London."

Elisabeth smiled at this young, shy Englishman.

"You will take me about a little? You will be kind to a poor German girl in a hostile land?"

"Oh, there's no hostility against the German people," said Anne quickly. "Don't get that idea into your head, Elisabeth."

"They are not very fond of our Führer," said Elisabeth with shining eyes. "There is a dreadful cartoon about him in the *Evening Standard* tonight. Poor man! And yet I'm sure he wants to be friends with England. It is all written in *Mein Kampf*. And he has a horror of war like all the soldiers who went through the last one. He has said so many times. He will never attack other peoples in Europe."

"I find all this very comforting," said Robin Bramley. "Judy, you and I are not going to be bombed in our beds after all. But what's the matter with your distinguished brother? He looks worried about something."

John Barton came back across the restaurant, slowly threading his way between the tables in an absent-minded way as though lost in unpleasing thought. Perhaps in the telephone box he had thrust his hand through his hair, for it had a tousled look out of keeping with his otherwise elegant appearance in full evening kit. From one of the tables his arm was grabbed by a young man dining with a small party. It was a young man named Bryan Feversham who belonged to the American Embassy in London. Barton spoke to him in a low voice, and seemed to tell him something startling, judging by his look of consternation followed by a hurried exit from the restaurant.

Robin watched John Barton curiously as he returned to his own table without, it seemed, any intention of resuming his seat.

"You know Elisabeth and Helmut," said Anne.

"Yes, indeed!" cried Elisabeth. "I remember an evening in Berlin when Mr. Barton entertained us both, and he was good enough to dine with us once."

It was an evening when John had given himself away as a jealous lover. He remembered it gloomily.

"Helmut has become London correspondent for his Berlin paper," said Anne. "He has been reassuring us about the European situation."

John Barton did not show any enthusiasm at meeting Helmut von Metsen again. He did not seem to be reassured about the European situation.

"That's fine!" he said, with dark irony. "But at the present moment a German army is occupying Czech towns and marching towards Prague."

He laughed as though announcing a good joke, but he was not really amused. He had defended Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement and the Munich Agreement in his dispatches to the *New York Observer*—the only American correspondent who had taken this line. His paper had received considerable abuse as a result of his messages and he had been accused of taking bribes from German agents. This new event made him look pretty foolish, he thought.

For a moment or two there was silence at the table. Anne was the first to speak.

"Adolf has let us down!" she said. "Order some more wine, David. In moments like this, it's best to take to drink."

Helmut von Metsen had become rather pale for a moment. He turned sharply to John Barton and spoke harshly.

"More newspaper rumours!" he said. "More Jewish lies from Warsaw or Prague! Why does England believe these things? America, of course, believes everything, every word of vile accusation against Germany, every sensational story."

"There are Americans at this table," said Anne. "They're my friends, Helmut."

"Oh, pardon!" said Helmut. "I'm sorry."

Elisabeth von Metsen, that elegant young woman with a Viennese hat, looked extremely distressed.

"There must be something wrong about it," she said.

"Hitler does not break his word. The German people would lose their faith in him if ever he broke his word."

"I'm afraid they'll lose their simple faith," said John Barton. "Or rather tomorrow they will accept what he tells them with the same perfect faith in his sincerity."

He looked at Anne for a moment and spoke in a quiet voice.

"Thanks for a charming dinner-party. And thanks a thousand times for kind words to an American observer. I have to go and see somebody in your Foreign Office."

"I hope it's not true," she said.

John raised his hand to the rest of the company and strode away through the crowded tables from which came a ceaseless chatter and light laughter. These people were not worrying about the international situation. None of them knew or cared what was happening in Czechoslovakia. The room had warmed up, and was heavy with the fumes of wine and cigars and women's perfume. No icy breath came into the Ecu de France because men in steel helmets, with armoured cars and tanks, and light and heavy artillery, were moving into Czech villages with unpronounceable names.

"If this is true," said David Ede, "it's rather serious news."

Robin Bramley laughed.

"The young Englishman," he said, "is a master of understatement. Judy, my dear, I think we had better get married tomorrow before I get called up to defend my King and Country somewhere in Poland—if Poland remains a geographical expression by the time I'm called up."

"But after all," asked Helmut with simple and genuine sincerity, "what has Poland to do with England? What has Czechoslovakia?"

Robin made a face like a Cabinet Minister.

"I shall require notice of that question," he said. "I shall have to think out the right answer."

"It will make no difference to our personal friendship," said Anne very sweetly to Elisabeth von Metsen.

"I'm afraid it may later on," said Elisabeth rather tearfully.

It was Robin who made her laugh again by some jest of his. He believed in his own theory that laughter was a rebuke to all human absurdities. Secretly he thought that if he could make the Germans laugh it would blow away the war clouds. If only they would laugh at the ranting of Dr. Goebbels! If only they would laugh at all this *Heil Hitlering*! He elaborated the theory to Judy Barton when he took her home that night to St. Leonard's Terrace after dancing with her and the others at the 'Grosvenor'.

"Supposing I go to Berchtesgaden," he said, "in order to save humanity by making Hitler laugh. Wouldn't it be a rather noble and life-saving mission?"

He made Judy laugh under a lamp-post while he held an umbrella over her head in the pouring rain which went down her neck when he kissed her.

IV

JOHN BARTON put on one side for a while the thought of his call back to New York at a date as yet unspecified, though it rankled in the back of his mind as a most unsettling prospect now that he had dug his roots so deep in English life. It was not that he had become un-American, but he was utterly absorbed in this European drama of which to some extent he was the daily historian and commentator for American readers, getting now and then behind the scenes, meeting some of its leading characters, mingling with its crowds and following its plot—a sensational melodrama—with intense and emotional interest. He hated the idea of leaving it at this time when Hitler's invasions and annexation of Czechoslovakia, contrary to all his pledges, had killed Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and confronted England, he imagined, with a new challenge of an aggressive force threatening the liberties of all the smaller nations of Europe and the future of democracy itself.

How would England answer that? he wondered. And that question was one he had to answer, if he could, for his own paper and his own people. They wanted to know.

Get Barton cable reaction British opinion on German aggression

was a cable received at his office by his immediate chief, old Mr. Franklin Speed, who handed it to him on the morning following his dinner in Jermyn Street, with a few dry words.

"If I know anything about England," said Mr. Speed, "I should say that they won't take it lying down. I'm

sorry for Mr. Chamberlain. It gives a great handle to all his critics, though it doesn't alter my own opinion that he did the wise and Christian thing when he went to Munich and postponed the second instalment of Armageddon."

John Barton, his chief correspondent, laughed uneasily.

"I'm afraid I'm in the same boat with Mr. Neville Chamberlain," he confessed. "Adolf Hitler has let us down! Perhaps I made a mistake in getting emotional over the Man with the Umbrella. That old umbrella seemed to symbolize the common sense of democratic man, but it's no weapon against the naked use of force. I've misled my readers. I've let down the paper, Mr. Speed. Perhaps that's why I've been recalled. What do you think?"

"Now I'll tell you," said Franklin Speed, that dry New Englander with his little goatee beard. He looked sharply at Barton through his steel-rimmed glasses. "You haven't been recalled as a mark of disfavour. I've had some very warm words about you from the Chief in New York and he's not in the habit of handing out bouquets. He's offering you a promotion, sonny. He thinks your European experience will be valuable for a time in Washington during a coming fight for the revision of the neutrality laws."

"It doesn't interest me," said John coldly. "Now that I've made all my contacts in England I don't want to get shifted. I've taken a house on a three years' lease and put my mother and sister in it with the family furniture."

"Keep on the lease," said Mr. Speed. "You'll be back again before the fall, I shouldn't be surprised. I'll try to arrange it."

"Well, that's nice of you," said Barton, looking less peeved. "I must say I'd be very grateful to you, Mr. Speed, if you could fix it that way."

"Take it as a hope and not as a promise," said Mr. Speed. "And referring back to your remarks about the Man with the Umbrella. I'd like to say that I think you're wrong, though as an old man I've no right to say so to a younger mind."

He smiled at Barton under his shaggy eyebrows.

"In my judgment," he said, "Mr. Chamberlain's umbrella is a symbol which will in the long run defeat the sign of the swastika. It stands for the eternal principles of liberty, conciliation and good will among men. They're not going to be destroyed, even in Germany, by the rantings of a man like Dr. Goebbels or the police methods of Himmler's guards."

"I like your faith, Mr. Speed!" said Barton, with a certain admiration behind his irony.

Mr. Franklin Speed, chief of the London office of the *New York Observer*, ignored the irony.

"My personal fear is," he added, "that under the influence of just indignation, Mr. Chamberlain may be tempted to swing too far in the other direction."

"I'm hoping he'll draw the line hard and tight against further aggression," said Barton. "There's only one language the Germans understand, and that's hard hitting."

"Great Britain will have to strengthen her defences," said Mr. Speed, "and I'm quite certain that the old spirit of the British people will reveal itself again as ready for every sacrifice. But my own personal view is this country would be unwise to take on more responsibility as an answer to another German aggression. Japan is at the end of the Axis and will certainly use this situation in Europe to undermine British interests in China—as well as ours maybe. Franco is undoubtedly winning in Spain. Madrid will certainly fall within a few days. That will be a new threat perhaps to Britain's free passage of the Mediterranean. Western Democracies, including the Scandinavian countries, should close up for their own defences without committing themselves too deeply in other and less vital regions. But I talk as an old fool, no doubt."

"No, sir," said John Barton, "you talk as a newspaper man of long experience. I have a high respect for your opinion, though I must say I think it's time the old British lion began to show its teeth and stiffen its tail. I'd like to

hear some roars which would be heard by the lesser beasts in the jungle. I'm going back on this policy of so-called appeasement. I'm hoping that Mr. Chamberlain will throw away his umbrella and grab at a sword as his new symbol. I'm getting bloody-minded. We can't let these dictators get away with it."

Mr. Franklin Speed laughed and gave a heavy sigh.

"I can't meet you half-way, John Barton, in any concession to the thought that war is not the greatest calamity of mankind and a crime against God. I don't want to see another massacre of the world's youth. But as a newspaper man I have to compromise with my principles and jeopardize my immortal soul!"

His thin lips twisted to a dry smile and he handed over a scrap of paper to young Barton. It was the cablegram from New York demanding an account of English reaction to the annexation of Czechoslovakia.

"I dare say you'll get busy on that," he said. "I'll be glad to read your messages during the next few weeks."

Before Barton left him he issued an invitation.

"Mrs. Speed and I would be glad if you would bring your mother and sister to dine with us next Friday evening at seven-thirty. We have one or two interesting guests whom you may be pleased to meet. They may help you to go deeper into the trend of English thought during the present situation."

Inwardly John Barton gave a groan. Mr. Franklin Speed's dinner-parties were very dull as a rule. And on Friday night he had hoped to persuade a certain young woman named Anne Ede to dine with him alone before going on to some show or dance. But this was almost in the nature of a Royal command.

"Why, that's very kind of you, Mr. Speed," he said. "I'm sure my mother and sister will be delighted to come."

He departed with the cablegram on his quest for the reaction of English opinion. That is to say he took a taxi back to St. Leonard's Terrace, stopped not at his own gate

but at one close by where he knew he could get one reaction on English public opinion from a man who was, perhaps, his best friend in London, typical of the idealists and peace lovers who had been most devoted in their support of Mr. Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. He was Peter Langdon, the novelist.

V

It was in Peter Langdon's little old house with its panelled rooms of Georgian date that Barton felt most at home outside his own front door. His friendship with this man was an intellectual understanding and comradeship not to be weakened by any difference of opinion which often happened between them. John had been with him in a time of crisis when he had revealed his agony of soul which had no personal fear, but was caused by his abhorrence of war—intensified, no doubt, because he dreaded lest his young son, Paul, should be dragged into the shambles, like those battalions of youth with whom he had served in France and Flanders in the great exhibition of human madness and mass murder, for causes already forgotten and already undone. Since then he had dedicated himself to the cause of peace. All his books had that secret and underlying purpose in their appeal to intelligence and human brotherhood.

Like so many of his fellow idealists, he had put his faith for a time in the League of Nations until utterly disillusioned by the failure of that dream, due, as he believed, to the selfishness and cynicism of small minds who called themselves statesmen, and to the passionate folly of national rivalry. Obsessed by the growing tension in Europe he had gone rather far—too far in the opinion of John Barton—in trying to build a bridge of peace between Germany and England, thereby risking all his popularity as a novelist and arousing the criticism of many readers who accused him of being 'pro-Nazi' and anti-democratic, in favour of Jew-baiting and concentration camps—this old-fashioned Liberal, steeped in the humanitarian ideals of the pre-war years and loyal to all liberties of the mind and soul!

He was up in his study on the fifth floor when John Barton called on him that morning, but his wife was in the drawing-room, into which the visitor was shown by the neat maid-servant who greeted him with a smile as a friend of the family.

Mrs. Langdon, whom John had the privilege of calling Katherine, was arranging flowers, surely not grown in English gardens during the boisterous month of March.

"Aren't these adorable?" she said. "I've just bought them from the gypsy-looking woman in Sloane Square. Do you know her stall there?"

She gave John a quick glance from her frank, smiling eyes.

"Hipped about something? The international situation or private affairs?"

"Both," said John. "They intermingle. I've been recalled to New York just as things are beginning to look exciting again in Europe. I'm feeling very sore about it. But I'm pleading for a respite."

"Oh, that's a tragedy!" cried Katherine Langdon. "Peter will miss you dreadfully. You've no idea how he values your friendship. He thinks it so good of you to come and chat with him so often. And I shall be heart-broken if we lose neighbours who have been so sweet to us."

John Barton was touched more than he could say, being a sentimentalist as far as his English friends were concerned.

"I feel like bursting into tears," he said. "If you go on saying things like that I shall have to put my arms round your neck and cry like a baby on your bosom."

Mrs. Langdon laughed at this threat from an American journalist who stood six feet in his socks and looked down upon her from this distinguished height.

"Well, I won't go on saying them! But what does your mother think about it, and Judy? Are they going back with you?"

"They are not," said John. "My mother declines to

take the matter seriously. She says I shall be back again before the fall, in time for the next crisis. She gets her information from the spirits, so I can't check her up on it. As for Judy, she's wrapped up in her love dream with that painter man, and won't go farther away from Knightsbridge than a shilling taxi drive."

"Poor John!" said Mrs. Langdon. "Then you'll have to go back alone."

John indulged in self-pity.

"If there's one thing I hate, it's loneliness. I want to be cherished. I want to be comforted."

Katherine Langdon looked at this six-foot American manhood suspiciously with a lurking smile.

"You're not thinking of that girl Anne Ede any more, are you?" she asked in her blunt way.

"You've guessed it," said John. "I keep on thinking of her. I can't get her out of my head or heart. I keep on hoping."

"There are lots of other girls," said Mrs. Langdon. "Now there's a sweet thing not more than six doors away who might like a trip to the United States with a well-to-do husband. She'd suit you better than your *belle dame sans merci*."

"What's wrong with Anne?" asked John. "Any grudge against her?"

Mrs. Langdon touched some of her flowers in one of the tall vases on her rosewood piano.

"I only know about her from Judy," she said carelessly. "She doesn't seem your sort, John. Isn't she rather cold and haughty? Wouldn't she be rather difficult for an American husband?"

John admitted the probability.

"The difficulties would be intense," he agreed. "But think of the delight, the glory and the hope."

He spoke more seriously.

"Anne's not cold or haughty. It's her spiritual armour to ward off the aggressive male. She has a heart, madam.

I've had glimpses of that. It's very kind and dead true, believe me."

"I'll believe you," said Katherine Langdon.

John apologized for his sentimental confession.

"I'm talking a dream of wish fulfilment," he said. "I'm ashamed of myself. I wouldn't have said so much if you hadn't broken down my self-reserve, lady. It's that mammy stuff which betrays the hardest-boiled American when he's off guard. But now I ought to tell you that I'm here on a professional visit, namely to get the reaction of your noble husband on the state of world affairs. I have to write a piece for the paper."

Katherine Langdon laughed.

"Oh, you'll get that all right! He's talking about it upstairs with two of his friends. You'd better go and join them."

"Fine!" said John. "That's my article for the *New York Observer*."

VI

"COME in," said the resonant voice of Peter Langdon when John Barton tapped at his study door.

He was standing with his back to one of his bookshelves, and raised his hand in salute as John entered.

"Hullo, John! Just in time for a spot of sherry."

There were two other men in the room, both of whom John had met before in this house at small dinner-parties. One was a tall, lean fellow, with a high forehead above a thin, haggard-looking face, with very long legs in grey flannel trousers which flapped around them when he walked. It was Adrian Jarrett, a scientist of some kind who worked at a bacteriological institute somewhere in Chelsea. The other was a youngish man with excitable eyes and speech named Gerald Link, whom John knew slightly as editor of a weekly review of Leftish views. They both nodded to him as he came in and said good morning in a casual way.

"The fact is, Langdon," said Gerald Link, "you utterly refuse to believe that the Chamberlain policy of appeasement was just another shameful surrender to bloody dictatorship. I hate to say, 'I told you so', but I do say so. I feel I must—caddish though it seems."

"My dear fellow, go on saying it," said Langdon good-humouredly, "if it gives you any sense of satisfaction. But I haven't altered my belief that Chamberlain did the right thing at Munich. It's not his fault that Hitler has repudiated his pledges."

Gerald Link sprang up and began to pace up and down the room like a caged beast.

"Not a good answer," he said impetuously. "Didn't the Labour Party and all of us who stand for civilized ideals

and the rule of law refuse to believe that there was any kind of sincerity in any word spoken by Hitler and his subordinate thugs?"

Langdon followed his paces up and down and answered quietly.

"I had an idea I stood for civilized ideas and the rule of law!"

Gerald Link laughed for a moment, and then stood in front of his friend like a prosecuting counsel bully-ragging a prisoner.

"Didn't we tell the Government that they were yielding step by step to blackmail and violence, which began with our ignoring the invasion of Manchukuo and went on with our crawl-down to Mussolini in Abyssinia, and has gone on ever since in every part of the world where brute force is winning its victories, while we lie down to be trampled on? Did we do a damn' thing about the rape of Austria? Wasn't Munich the most shameful betrayal in history?"

"No," said Langdon. "I can't see it."

"Wasn't it clear that after Munich none of the smaller nations could be secure?" Gerald Link spoke with a kind of exasperation. "Czechoslovakia was doomed when we agreed to the cession of the Sudetens. Now it has been annexed to the German Reich. Who comes next—Poland, Hungary, Rumania? By God, Langdon, there's no limit to the ambitions of that mystical maniac! He's out for world domination. And if that man Chamberlain continues as Prime Minister of this country, I, for one, shall be tempted to clear out and go to the United States for safe sanctuary. I decline to wait till I hear the tramp of German feet down Piccadilly or lose my way in the ruins of Westminster."

Peter Langdon laughed and fingered the bowl of his pipe nervously.

"My dear Gerald," he said, "don't glare at me as if I were responsible for the international situation."

He turned towards John Barton with a smile.

"I'm getting it rather hot!" he said. "Gerald Link seems to think I've been letting him down. He forgets he was one of those who went to Heston to cheer Chamberlain when he made his first flight to Berchtesgaden."

Gerald coloured slightly at this reminder.

"A momentary weakness which I regret," he said. "And I had no idea that he would bring back that kind of peace. But what baffles me—and many of us who used to put our faith in you as one of our idealists—is your friendly attitude to Germany and your persistent advocacy of peace and friendship with those people—moral slaves, defenders of tyranny, Jew-baiters, bullies, disciples of Dr. Goebbels in whom they believe!"

Langdon answered rather sharply with a slightly heightened colour.

"The German people still want to be friends with us. I was there a week ago. I received nothing but kindness and good will. I spoke with humble folk who had the same horror of war as most of us here. They still have a reverence for Mr. Chamberlain as a man of peace. They're bewildered and afraid because of the dark curtain which hides their future, and that of all of us. If we could speak directly to the people there would be no war."

Gerald Link shook his head.

"Another illusion. The German people will go into the next war as they did into the last, with cheers and songs. They have made Hitler their god. They will obey his commands. To them Hitler is always right. No, my dear Langdon, I fear you are like so many other English idealists of the old school who believe in the virtue of kind words and intelligent argument."

"Don't you?" asked Langdon with a hint of irony.

"No!" said Gerald Link. "Kind words don't cut any ice with Adolf or Mr. Champagne Ribbentrop. They only take them as British hypocrisy, or, what is better for them, British weakness. As for intelligence, they're against it. There's only one answer now—bombing aeroplanes as fast

as we can build them, National Service for everybody, and a closing up of the democracies with Soviet Russia in defence of liberty."

Langdon raised both hands and laughed harshly.

"A lovely prospect, Gerald. Force against force. Power politics against power politics. A defence of liberty and democracy with the kind aid of Mr. Stalin of Soviet Russia, that noble example of democratic principles, that well-known champion of freedom! So we have come to that, after all our hopes and all our ideals! *Homo sapiens!* The Age of Reason! The Brave New World!"

For a moment there was silence among these four men.

John Barton, who had confessed to his chief that he was becoming 'bloody-minded'—he hadn't meant it to be taken literally—was in a mood to agree with this fellow Gerald Link, though he hated to hurt Langdon by saying so. The only argument now with Germany, he thought, was hard hitting by word and deed. No more concessions. No more yielding to the *fait accompli*.

It was Adrian Jarrett, the scientist, who took up the argument.

"I look at these things from a different angle," he said. "Naturally I regard war as the worst degradation of the civilized mind. Win or lose, it will destroy the things we think we're fighting for. Liberty? Where will be liberty when the guns go off and the sergeant-major is in control, with censorship, propaganda, counter-espionage and all that denial of free thought and free action? Honour! There won't be a rag of honour left by the time the murder has gone on for a while. Each side will use every weapon and every horror for self-preservation. There wasn't much chivalry in the last war. There will be none in the next. But all the same, we can't let Hitler get away with his programme. We've got to stop him. We've got to defend the small nations and our own possessions. We can't lie down and be trampled on by the German jack-boot."

"Well then!" said Gerald Link argumentatively.

Adrian Jarrett, this man of science, sucked a gurgling pipe for a moment.

"We have in our hands one infallible weapon which would stop all this nonsense, without firing a shot. Why don't we use it?"

"What weapon?" asked Gerald Link with a sceptical laugh. "Some imaginary death ray? Some bacteriological microbe? I've heard many of those fairy tales."

"Mineral sanctions," said Jarrett.

Gerald Link was scornful and impatient.

"Is that a patent medicine?" he asked. "Aren't we talking seriously and trying to get down to fundamentals?"

"Certainly," said Jarrett. "If you would only pay attention, my dear fellow. But you're so damned emotional."

"What's the idea?" asked John Barton.

"It's not an idea," said Jarrett, with his air of scientific infallibility. "It's a hard fact staring us in the face, ready to hand, to stop the effective armaments of any nation condemned as an aggressor. The Japanese in China, for instance, the German war machine in Europe; our Machiavellian friend Signor Mussolini. We could bring them all to a full stop by cutting off the supply of raw material required for their guns, tanks, aeroplanes and other little toys."

"What do you mean by 'we'?" asked Gerald Link.

"The British Empire plus, if possible, the United States. Almost Canada alone. The Sudbury mines in Canada produce ninety-eight per cent of the world's supply of nickel. Nickel is necessary as an alloy for the hardest types of steel. Cut off nickel, and a few other things, and we bunker the world's armament factories."

"Good lord!" said Langdon. "Is that really so?"

"Of course the Germans are pretty good at finding substitutes," said Jarrett, "but they can't do without metals like molybdenum, tungsten and others. You can't make guns out of brown paper or wood pulp. The British Empire, plus the United States, could shut down on

practically everything they need for the production of high-grade steel."

Gerald Link became excited. He was very easily roused to excitement.

"That's an idea! My God! Then why, in hell's name, do we supply those metals to our potential enemies? Of course the answer is obvious."

"Not to me," said Peter Langdon. "I'm a literary gent."

"Greed, my dear sir," said Adrian Jarrett. "The lust of the money-maker. The utter immorality of Big Business with its stranglehold on politics. The Americans are shipping innumerable tons of scrap-iron to Japan to turn into guns and aerial bombs for the massacre of Chinese civilians. Do you think President Roosevelt could stop that by private entreaty or public command? Not on your life!"

"It's not beyond the bounds of possibility," said John Barton.

Jarrett ignored this optimism.

"Do you think the Canadian Government could be induced to stop the supply of nickel to Germany or any other nation not openly at war with us? Highly improbable. The French are still supplying Germany with the iron ore from Lorraine which will be used to blast French soldiers out of the Maginot Line. We are selling scrap-iron and all our minerals to the Tokio-Berlin-Rome Axis, and all our traders—whose sons will perish in the next war—are declaring excellent dividends with bland satisfaction. A mad world, my masters!"

"My God!" said Gerald Link, as though shocked and stunned by human wickedness. "My God!"

Peter Langdon spoke like a man who sees light ahead:

"Jarrett, haven't you got hold of something vastly important? Can't we do something about it? Can we put it up privately to the Prime Minister?"

Jarrett laughed.

"It's not an original idea, Langdon," he admitted. "It was all written in a book by a friend of mine, Thomas Holland, *Mineral Sanctions*. Do you think anybody took any notice of it? 'There must be a snag somewhere,' said his critics. But there ain't no blooming snag, except in the greedy guts of our blasted traders, and the blue funk in the souls of our craven legislators."

"Not all of them," said Langdon in his tolerant way. "Chamberlain——"

Gerald Link had stopped pacing up and down like a caged animal and was sitting on the edge of Langdon's writing-table. Now he jumped up again with a shrill laugh.

"Spare us!" he said. "If ever any set of men ought to be handed a bunch of white heather it's that group of mugwumps who sit on the Front Bench. What will Chamberlain do in answer to this annexation of Czechoslovakia? A feeble whine of protest, or a washing of hands like Pontius Pilate?"

"I believe in his moral courage," said Langdon doggedly. "You're very unfair to him."

Gerald Link laughed good-naturedly.

"Sorry if I seem unfair," he said. "I'm very worked up about the destruction of the Czechs. Himmler's police have arrested thousands of them in Prague, and we've betrayed them as we betray almost everyone everywhere."

Langdon shook his head.

"That kind of talk doesn't do any good."

Gerald held out his hand.

"Peter Langdon," he said. "You're an incurable idealist and dreamer of dreams! But I ought to be going. My people at the office will wonder why I don't turn up."

"Stay and have a sherry," said Langdon.

He wouldn't stay for a sherry, and Adrian Jarrett, the man of science, uncoiled his stork-like legs and rose also.

"All very interesting," he said. "But I must be off. Well—*Heil Hitler*, and all that."

He gave the Fascist salute to his friend before departing.

John Barton waited until the door was shut upon them and then grinned at Peter Langdon, who stood lost in thought.

"Well," said John, "some of that's fine stuff for my dispatch on England's reaction to Mr. Hitler."

VII

IN another place he was able to see and hear something of the mood and temper of England at this time.

As special correspondent of an American newspaper which had taken a friendly line to England, John Barton had been given the privilege of a press ticket to a dinner in Birmingham which was to be addressed by the Prime Minister on his seventieth birthday. All England, and indeed the whole world, waited to hear what the British Prime Minister would have to say about the annexation of Czechoslovakia which had killed the Munich Agreement stone-dead and violated all the promises which had been made to Chamberlain himself. The speech was to be broadcast throughout the Empire and relayed to America. It might be one of the turning points of history and one of the cross-roads of destiny leading one way to peace and the other to war.

This idea was put to John by an English journalist named Harrington whom he had met in Berlin and Vienna in times of crisis. He spoke gloomily across the table :

"I suppose what Chamberlain says tonight will decide whether my generation has to die in dirty ditches while civilization goes up in smoke and flame—or otherwise !"

Harrington was apt to take exaggerated views, thought John Barton, and he had not been very sound in his deductions and prophecies during recent history. He had refused to believe that Hitler would annex Austria. John had been with him during a Vienna night when the Austrian inhabitants of that city had gone mad and kissed the chains being fastened upon them, according to the view John took of that evening, though Harrington had a different view.

Now he sat at the press table looking rather glum, but friendly in his greeting to a fellow correspondent.

"I hope he won't go back on his policy of appeasement," said Harrington a little later. "I hope he won't be goaded into war by those bloody-minded people on the Opposition Benches who used to call themselves pacifists and are now worshipping the God of Battles."

"I'm not arguing," said John Barton. "I'm listening. What sort of a crowd is this? They look remarkably like a Rotary Club assembly in Grand Rapids or Scranton, Pennsylvania."

Harrington grinned and lost his sulky look.

"This is the annual meeting of the Birmingham Unionist Association," he explained. "Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing," said John.

Harrington laughed at this ignorance of English history during the nineteenth century.

"It used to be the headquarters of reaction, jingoism and trade selfishness. Here was born Tariff Reform, which broke our traditional policy of Free Trade and led to the system of economic nationalism which is the underlying cause of war and rumours of war. Joe Chamberlain was its presiding genius, and the name of Chamberlain is still a magic spell in Birmingham, worshipped in pubs and picture houses. But now, by an infernal paradox, the Conservatives have become Liberals, and the Radicals who used to be the peace-at-any-price men have become the jingoes and the militarists. All very odd."

"All very interesting," agreed John good-naturedly.

He stared round the banqueting hall with its long tables crowded with men and women in evening dress—typical business men he thought, but with here and there an odd, interesting face. Some of them looked like soldiers out of uniform. Of course they had all fought in the last war anyhow, he remembered. Some of them looked like fox-hunting squires. One of them might have been the model of a portrait by Franz Hals—The Laughing Cavalier.

When the Prime Minister arrived, looking extraordinarily carefree, he received a deafening ovation.

"They still seem to like him," thought our American observer. "He doesn't seem to have lost favour in this place, in spite of the breakdown of his appeasement policy."

He watched the Prime Minister as he sat at table talking with good humour and gaiety during dinner.

"If I had half that man's responsibility," thought John, "I should be wan and haggard. I couldn't sleep at night. And he's seventy today according to the calendar! I wonder what I'll look like at seventy, and if I'll have any grandchildren clinging to my bony knees."

For a few moments his thoughts wandered away from this scene in Birmingham, and for some reason—the association of ideas, perhaps—his mind paid a visit to a young English beauty named Anne Ede. She had asked him to dinner at her father's town house on the following night. He rather hoped to have some private conversation with her. His thoughts on this subject were interrupted by a man sitting next him—a tall, square-shouldered old man whose shirtfront bulged over his white waistcoat which in New York would be called a vest. . . . John had taken a glance at his card and seen that he was Sir Jonathan Brinsley, Bart., which, being interpreted, meant a baronet.

"Mr. Chamberlain is looking in fine form tonight," he said. "Marvellous at seventy."

"It certainly is," agreed John.

Perhaps there was something in his accent which revealed his American nationality, because a few moments later the old gentleman asked a question about the United States.

"May I ask, sir, what is the general feeling in America about the present situation in Europe?"

John hedged slightly. He had been reading cabled extracts from the American newspapers. They were not favourable to Mr. Chamberlain or to his policy of appeasement. They thought England was lying down before the Dictators. They blamed Mr. Chamberlain for the annexa-

tion of Czechoslovakia as the direct and inevitable result of the 'surrender' at Munich. One of his contemporaries had gone so far as to say that Chamberlain was the laughing-stock of the world. "When will England," wrote this American columnist, "get up from its back and show something like a fight for the liberties of which it was once the champion in its proud old days? Or is it going to take the count? Doesn't it look as though Great Britain wanted other people to fight its battles while its old gentlemen sit back in their arm-chairs in senile decrepitude, and English youth, round-shouldered and hollow-chested, smoked cigarettes paid for by the dole?" John had read this article recently.

"I've been away from my country for some time," he answered. "But from reports reaching me I should say that the opinion in the United States is not in favour of Adolf Hitler or his latest action."

"I should hope not, indeed!" said this English baronet. "By God, sir, we must stop that man Hitler from trampling over Europe like a mad bull. And I hope we can count on American co-operation in the event of war. When is Mr. Roosevelt going to repeal the neutrality laws which prevent any help from coming to us if anything happens?"

"Mr. Roosevelt will certainly do something about it," said John hopefully. "But it won't be easy, with a hostile Senate."

Sir Jonathan Brinsley glanced sideways at his dinner companion.

"I don't profess to understand American politics," he admitted. "But your President seems to be taking the right line in international affairs. That was a very fine message he sent to Hitler during the September crisis. A hard knock for your isolationists I should say!"

"They didn't like it," said John.

"You want a touch of dictatorship over there," said Sir Jonathan. "By God, sir, how are we going to stand up to dictators and defend the liberties of civilization if we pander to all this democratic nonsense? Look at Chamberlain, harried and harassed by a professional Opposition."

John spluttered over his wine for a moment.

Surely he was sitting next to Colonel Blimp as created by that genius Low, whose caricatures he cut out and sent to his American friends.

Harrington, his fellow journalist, sitting opposite, caught his eye and grinned.

"We're a great people!" said Harrington, leaning forward slightly. "Don't you underestimate the bulldog breed!"

There was a storm of cheers when Chamberlain rose to make his speech. He stood smiling and holding the lapels of his coat. The last time that Barton had seen him was when he came back from Munich and had been cheered by thousands of people on the way to Downing Street before the cry of 'surrender' and 'betrayal' had followed the cheers. He hadn't changed since then, he looked younger than his years, and with no sign of the strain that must have borne down on him month after month, with an Opposition deriding him and denouncing him with bitter hostility.

He began his speech by an allusion to his seventieth birthday, which he had hoped to keep quiet, he said. Then, after a few bantering sentences, he went straight to the heart of things. Public opinion in the world, he said, had received a sharper shock than had ever yet been administered to it, even by the present régime in Germany. What, he asked, would be the ultimate effect of this profound disturbance on men's minds? It could not yet be foretold, but he was sure that it must be far-reaching in its effects upon the future.

He spoke for a few minutes about his German visits and repudiated the idea put out by his critics that the occupation of Czechoslovakia was the direct result of those visits, and that therefore he was personally responsible for what had happened. He didn't agree with those people who said, "We considered that you were wrong in September and now we have been proved to be right." He still held that he had been right to do what he did in September. The

peace of Europe had been saved, and, but for those visits, millions of people would now be mourning for the flower of Europe's best manhood. Nothing could have saved the invasion and destruction of Czechoslovakia then, if war had happened. And even if, after frightful losses, we had won the war, we should never have put the Sudeten Germans again under Czech rule, or reconstructed that State as it was framed by the Treaty of Versailles.

He had had another purpose in going to Germany. It was to promote a policy which might by all efforts of goodwill lead to questions being settled by discussion rather than by force. He believed that he had done something in that direction. Hitler had made certain pledges to him. At Berchtesgaden he had said that this was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe and that he had no wish to include in the Reich people of other races than German. He had repeated that pledge publicly at the Sportspalast in Berlin when he said, "This is the last territorial claim I have to make in Europe!" He added that he had assured Mr. Chamberlain that when this problem was settled Germany had no more territorial problems in Europe. And he had added, "I shall not be interested in the Czech State any more, and I can guarantee it. We don't want any Czechs. . . ."

In view of these repeated assurances given to him voluntarily, he considered himself justified in hoping that when the Munich Agreement was made it would lead further to a policy of appeasement and European peace. He was convinced that after Munich, the great majority of the British people shared that hope and ardently desired that the policy should be carried further.

The Prime Minister's speech was interrupted while cheers greeted these words, and then suddenly they were silent as they saw by the expression on the Prime Minister's face that he had some emotional thought in his mind. When he spoke again, it was more tensely, with a kind of restrained anger.

"How can these events this week," he asked, "be reconciled with those assurances which I have read out to you?"

For a moment he was interrupted again by a kind of murmur of indignation from the crowded tables.

"They can't be," said Sir Jonathan Brinsley, sitting next to Barton. "That fellow Hitler is a liar."

"Surely," said Mr. Chamberlain, "as a joint signatory to the Munich Agreement, I was entitled to that consultation which is provided for in that Munich declaration, if Herr Hitler thought it ought to be undone. Instead of that, he has taken the law into his own hands. Before even the Czech President was received, and confronted with demands which he had no power to resist, German troops were on the move and in a few hours they were in the Czech capital."

"Shame!" shouted many voices, including that of the old gentleman sitting next to John Barton. He scowled fiercely over his bulging shirt, and then gulped down some wine to cool his indignation.

The Prime Minister ridiculed the idea that internal disorders in Czechoslovakia could have been any menace to the mighty neighbour of that little State, and then he spoke again with great gravity.

"Does not the question inevitably arise in our minds that if it is so easy to discover good reasons for ignoring assurances so solemnly and so repeatedly given, what reliance can be placed upon any other assurances that come from the same source?"

He faced his audience squarely and put to it a series of questions which had been raised in the minds of all thoughtful men and women.

"Is this the end of an old adventure, or is it the beginning of a new?" . . .

"Is this the last attack upon a small State or is it to be followed by others?" . . .

"Is this, in fact, an attempt to dominate the world by force?"

There was a deep silence in that banqueting room at Birmingham when he asked that last question, not with any

melodramatic utterance, not with the tricks of an old orator to stir emotion or get a cheer, but with a sincerity and simplicity which had a profound effect upon those listening to him. It was as though in that terrible question the fate of the world was at stake, as indeed it was.

Later in his speech, his voice broke for a moment when he referred to his own convictions and purpose in life.

"I do not believe there is anyone who will question my sincerity when I say there is hardly anything I would not sacrifice for peace. But there is one thing I must except, and that is the liberty we have enjoyed for hundreds of years and will never surrender."

Those words seemed very stirring to that assembly of men and women in Birmingham. The cheers lasted for what seemed like many minutes, and John Barton felt strangely moved. He was a foreigner in this crowd, though their blood was in his veins. Here, he thought, is the old English spirit. This is the spirit of Magna Charta and Elizabethan England and all those people in this little old island who had fought for their liberties during a thousand years of struggle and strife. These Birmingham people, he thought, belonged to the real old stock and stuff of England. Their spirit was rising. It was not the spirit of surrender. Then he saw an ironical look of that English journalist, Harrington, and read the satire in his smile, so that he pulled himself out of this emotional state.

"Laddie," said Barton to himself, "don't forget you're an American correspondent, and not an English patriot offering his life in defence of ancient liberties."

He lost the thread of this speech by the Prime Minister, who came presently to his own answer to the questions he had asked while the great audience listened in tense silence.

"I feel bound to repeat that, while I am not prepared to engage this country by new, unspecified commitments operating under conditions which cannot now be foreseen, yet no greater mistake could be made than to suppose that because it believes war to be a senseless and cruel thing, this

nation has so lost its fibre that it will not take part to the utmost of its power in resisting such a challenge if ever it is made."

He had reached his peroration, and afterwards had an ovation which seemed to show that he had not lost his following in the country in spite of all his critics who accused him of weakness, cowardice and insincerity.

"I call that a good speech," said John Barton to his friend Harrington.

"Yes, I could see that your simple soul was moved by it," said Harrington. "It left me cold, or rather it fills me with alarm."

"Why this fear?"

"The old man has become indignant," said Harrington. "He's suffering from wounded pride because he thinks Adolf has made a fool of him."

"Perhaps he'll make a fool of Adolf," suggested John Barton.

"In that speech," said Harrington, "I heard the voice of moral indignation, which is always very dangerous. In another week or two the stage will be set for another world war. The policy of appeasement is dead. Up Guards and at 'em! God bless the Black Watch! Let's all get ready for death and glory in defence of Poles, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Rumanians, and other high exponents of civilization in the east of Europe."

"Sir," said Sir Jonathan Brinsley, who had overheard these bitter words, "if it weren't for the presence of ladies I would have great pleasure in kicking your backside. We don't like that type of mind in Birmingham."

Harrington smiled in his supercilious way.

"Don't they teach manners in the elementary schools of this city?" he asked suavely.

John left them to argue it out. He had to catch a train back from Birmingham. But he agreed on one point with his friend Harrington.

The policy of appeasement was dead.

VIII

As raw material for his commentaries on English life and thought, Barton gathered a good harvest one evening at the town house of the Earl of Stanfield, who had the honour of being the father of Lady Anne Ede. It was also during that evening that he did some useful propaganda work on his own behalf, with that flower of English beauty, as once he had called her. He and Judy were among the guests at a small dinner-party which included that German brother and sister, Helmut and Elisabeth von Metsen, much to his secret annoyance—not because they were Germans, but because he was getting anxious again about Anne's renewed friendship with that young man. Robin Bramley, cousin of the family, was also there, and among the guests was an ex-Cabinet Minister—the Right Hon. Vivian Merston—and the Rev. John Hackett, vicar of St. Peter's, who, as John happened to know, was an ardent pacifist.

John had lost his sense of uneasiness regarding the social behaviour necessary in one of the strongholds of the aristocracy of England, though even now he felt more at ease among the intellectuals of Bloomsbury and those of his own type and style in Chelsea. He would have preferred another dinner with Anne in a Jermyn Street restaurant or somewhere in Soho. But it was not, he found, very formidable or unduly alarming when he was once past the front door of a tall, grim-looking house, which badly needed a new coat of paint, in Belgrave Place.

John and Judy had arrived rather too early in order to break the American reputation of arriving rather too late. In the hall, the old butler whom they had met at the family's country house near Horsham, was carrying a tray

with sherry which he put down on an oak settle in order to help John take off his coat, while Judy was shown into an opposite room by the maid who opened the door.

"You're a bit early," said the old man. "Dinner at eight, you know."

"Sorry," said John. "Shall we walk round the Square once or twice and study the habits of the English sparrows?"

The old man ignored that suggestion, which he regarded rightly as humorous.

"Her ladyship is dressing," he explained, "and his lordship is in the study reading the evening paper, which, I dare say, will spoil his appetite for dinner. That man Hitler is no good to anybody in my opinion. Can't trust him, you know. A very restless fellow!"

There was the sound of a key in the Yale lock of the front door, and the slim figure of a young girl came into the hall hurriedly.

"Gosh!" she cried. "Is it as late as all that? I'll have to do a record change."

It was Marjorie Ede, the sister of Anne, with a little flower-pot hat stuck on her head, and a transparent raincoat over her walking dress. She seemed to have been walking in the rain.

"Eleven minutes, Lady Marjorie," said the old butler warningly. "And you'll get what for from her ladyship if you're late for dinner again."

"Shut up!" said Lady Marjorie. "I can do it if I don't wash behind my ears."

She glanced at John Barton for a moment and then held out her hand.

"Oh, hullo! The last time we met was in Berlin, wasn't it? You were rather sweet on Anne, weren't you?"

"I was," said John. "And I haven't a changeable disposition."

"Oh lord!" said Marjorie. "I've been in love six times since then. Well, excuse me, won't you?"

She darted upstairs and John heard her shouting down a passage.

"Anne! Here are your American friends. Hold the fort while I get changed."

Anne came downstairs in time to greet Judy who had emerged from a little dark room on the left of the hall.

"It's good of you to come," said Anne. "You'll get a filthy dinner because our cook went on strike this morning and departed in a huff. One of the housemaids took on the job but as she's in love with a butcher I don't suppose it will be very successful."

"Does love with a butcher-boy interfere with the art of cooking?" asked John.

"It creates disorder of the mind, I've heard," said Anne, with a sideways smile at him. "Come up to the drawing-room and have a glass of sherry. Frank is there fast asleep behind a copy of the *Evening News*. He was late last night at the garage."

Frank was Viscount Ede, the eldest son of the Earl of Stanfield, who had the honour of being the father of Anne.

He was awakened when they went into the drawing-room—a large room divided by folding doors thrown open. On the walls, as John noticed, were some water-colour paintings of the mid-Victorian era, and from the ceiling hung an enormous chandelier of cut glass. The chairs and sofas were covered in chintz somewhat faded and a little grubby.

"Good evening," said Viscount Ede, raising himself from a sofa where he had been lying at full length. "Have some sherry, won't you?"

He shook hands with Judy and smiled at her.

"Is it a fact that you're engaged to that oil-painting cousin of mine?"

Judy admitted the fact cheerfully.

"Well, I call that an act of faith, hope and charity," he said. "Still, I dare say Robin makes more out of painting than I do out of running a garage which is dragging me down to ruin."

He nodded to John.

"Still reporting for the papers?"

"Yes," said John. "History day by day."

"Marvellous!" said young Ede, commonly called Frank. "You newspaper fellows seem to get behind the scenes. Or do you make it all up?"

"Now then, Frank!" said Anne warningly. "Don't go insulting a distinguished journalist who is breaking bread with us tonight."

"Heavens, no!" said her brother hurriedly. "No offence meant whatever. I wish to goodness I had a talent for writing, or the slightest touch of imagination. If so I might earn some honest guineas now and then. I'm told that young Kilmainham earns three thousand a year as Mr. Gossip. Pretty good—what?"

"He ought to be horsewhipped," said Anne, laughing at the idea of her brother writing as one of the Peeping Toms of the sensational press.

At that moment her mother came into the room looking somewhat formidable in a black evening dress with a glitter of diamonds in her hair.

"Isn't everybody preposterously early tonight?" she asked.

She took Judy's hand and patted it.

"Didn't someone tell you we dine at eight o'clock?"

It was then eight minutes to eight, or thereabouts.

"Oh, mother!" cried Anne, laughing. "What does it matter, a few minutes one way or the other? Besides, John and Judy are friends of the family. In fact they'll soon be relatives when Judy marries Robin."

"It was nice of her to say that," thought John. But it was also a strange thought for an American journalist. There would be something to say in Middleboro, Massachusetts, if they heard that a member of the Barton family was making a Royal alliance or something like it.

Strange noises were happening outside the drawing-room door. It was the Earl of Stanfield blowing his nose

in a trumpeting way before entering the room. He came in flicking a handkerchief—a tall, big-shouldered man with a rustic appearance which had deceived John Barton at their first meeting on his country estate so that he had almost tipped him half a crown in the belief that he was a gamekeeper.

"I've caught a chill," he said. "There are enough draughts in the House of Lords to cut off the heads of the whole crowd of us."

"Well, don't wave microbes about in the drawing-room," said Lady Stanfield severely.

The other guests arrived. Among them was Robin Bramley, who crossed the room and kissed Judy as though they were alone in a woodland glade. Helmut von Metsen and his sister appeared, making John surly in his inmost soul.

"Damn that good-looking German!" he said to himself. "He's hanging round Anne again. If there's a war, I shall be glad to see him in a concentration camp."

The ex-Cabinet Minister shambled in—a heavy-jowled man with a humorous mouth and tired blue eyes.

"How do you do?" he said to Lady Stanfield. "How is it you grow so young and beautiful, while I keep growing old and ugly? It isn't fair."

Lady Stanfield laughed and gave him a push.

"You humbug!" she said. "That's how you talk in the House of Commons. Eyewash and insincerity!"

Last to arrive was the vicar of St. Peter's, with a thin and ascetic face and prematurely white hair, but with a keen, alert look and a twinkle of humour in his eyes.

"I was afraid I couldn't come," he said. "I was on a committee dealing with the Jewish refugees and it became rather prolonged and rather heated."

"Where's Marjorie?" asked Lady Stanfield. "That girl is going to the dogs. She's always gadding off with disreputable young people who go from one cocktail-party to another."

"You're maligning the lass," said Robin Bramley. "Here she is, looking as demure as a milkmaid. Hullo, Snooks!"

Marjorie Ede came in, looking fresh and full of grace in an evening frock of some elegance.

"Dinner ready?" she asked, with an air of simple inquiry.

She had dressed herself in seven minutes, and looked perfect except for something wrong about her feet, which only Robin noticed with his artist's eye.

"Pretty good, Snooks," he whispered to her. "But you haven't changed your shoes, old girl. They don't go with that frock."

"Dinner is served," said the old butler.

IX

JOHN sat on the left side of Lady Stanfield whom he had once described to Judy as 'Bloody Mary'. He was stricken for a moment by the fantastic thought that if he married Anne by the grace of God, or by some miracle, Lady Stanfield would be his mother-in-law. And as he looked round this dinner-table with the Earl of Stanfield at the other end, with Judy on one side of him and Elisabeth von Metsen on the other, he knew that the audacity of Christopher Columbus was as nothing compared with the extreme foolhardiness of his own dream that one day he might take Anne with him to the United States.

He was an American reporter on uncertain tenure. Anne belonged in blood and spirit to this ancient family of hers with its long tradition of pride and privilege. The privilege was no doubt losing its power and its place. The family had become poor, and hard-pressed by death duties and income tax, and the economic changes in English social life. That fellow Frank, as they called him, ran a garage round the corner, and was losing money on it. The old man had admitted to him that he couldn't keep up the family mansion much longer. Anne had always stressed their increasing poverty. But their pride remained, no doubt. How did he ever dare to think of an alliance by marriage with such a family, who would probably treat him as one of their flunkies if he suggested such a thing! He looked over at Anne and she caught his glance and smiled at him.

She was in the right background in this old room with its mid-Victorian furniture and panelled walls. He could not imagine her in a New York apartment with its modern

gadgets and its lack of domestic service except at a cost beyond his means. It was pretty hopeless, he thought. The light from the candelabra touched her fair hair and put shadows under her deep brow. She was like the portrait of a lady by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

"Now then, young man," said Lady Stanfield. "Get on with your soup. It tastes like dishwater, but it's quite harmless I hope. Our cook has gone on strike. In fact she packed her boxes and went off this morning, in a rage, all because I told her she had no more idea of cooking than a sick headache."

"Quick to take offence," suggested John with a polite smile.

"Yes, they're all spoilt nowadays. I'm thinking of getting a few refugees. But friends of mine tell me that the Jews are so well educated that their employers find them entertaining the guests and putting them quite into the shade. The other day Lady Barnsley found her son playing the piano with a young woman who called herself housemaid but had been an opera singer in Vienna. Now they've gone off together and are living on the hire-purchase system in Golder's Green."

"Quite a romance!" said John.

Lady Stanfield agreed, but said she was against romance. She had to keep her eye on Marjorie, who had a romantic disposition. She was in love at the present moment with a young Communist just down from Cambridge who lived by writing for Left-Wing papers. He was a conscientious objector, it appeared, and had announced his intention of going to prison rather than fight for his King and country.

"I can't get Marjorie to take an interest in A.R.P.," said Lady Stanfield somewhat later. "She was supposed to deliver the gas masks to our village folk but forgot all about them after dumping them in one of the stables."

"I hope the village won't need them," said John earnestly. . . .

Lady Stanfield was of opinion that there was too much fuss being made about bombing.

"I refuse to have the jitters," she said firmly. "The only thing that frightens me is the shocking inefficiency of our so-called Government. I should like to sweep most of them out with a broom."

"Is there any constitutional objection to a female Prime Minister?" asked John, partly for conversation's sake but partly because he had a secret belief that if Lady Stanfield could be Prime Minister of Great Britain she would stand no nonsense from dictators on the one side or conscientious objectors on the other.

"None whatever, as far as I know," said Lady Stanfield. "In fact most of our recent Prime Ministers have been old women who couldn't say boo to a goose, though you mustn't tell my husband I said so."

She gave a smiling glance at John, and then turned to the Right Hon. Vivian Merston who was sitting at her right hand and talking earnestly to Anne.

"Don't murmur your words of wit and wisdom, Vivian," she said. "Won't you let us all hear what you think of the present situation? What is Neville Chamberlain going to do with us? I know what he ought to do!"

"I should be glad to hear it, Alice," said the elder statesman. "I might pass it on to the P.M."

"Bring in conscription," said Lady Stanfield. "Make every mother's son rally up for National Service. Round up the slackers. Get a bit of discipline going in this disorderly land."

"Hear, hear, my dear!" said her husband at the end of the table.

The Right Hon. Vivian Merston looked shocked.

"This country wouldn't stand for conscription," he said. "The Opposition would put up an almighty row and talk of broken words. The P.M. has repeatedly pledged himself not to bring in conscription without going to the country."

Helmut von Metsen seemed to be interested.

"Pardon me," he said politely, "but is not conscription alien to the liberal tradition of England?"

He was answered by Lord Stanfield.

"It's not gainst the liberal tradition of England to raise a militia for the defence of the country. We did it when old Nap was threatening invasion."

"It would be a great shock to Germany," said Helmut. "We should regard it as a real menace to peace."

It was Anne who was first to laugh.

"My dear Helmut," she said, "the simplicity of the German mind is wonderful. Excuse our ribald mirth."

"Very amusing," said Frank, who was Viscount Ede.

"But why?" asked Helmut, looking hurt and baffled. "What have I said that is funny?"

It was Marjorie who explained the joke to him.

"In Berlin and every German city one hears the tramp of marching youth," she reminded him. "These girlish eyes of mine have seen those battalions of blue-eyed boys."

"Ah yes!" said Helmut. "But that is part of our German system. We should be very sorry to see England depart from its amateur status of free volunteers. Such a radical change in your people would seem to us that you believed in the inevitability of war—with Germany as the enemy!"

"Hasn't Germany forced it on us, my dear fellow?" asked Lord Stanfield. "We can speak frankly at this table of course, and in the friendliest possible way—you know I am all for a friendly understanding with Germany. But I must say . . ."

He hesitated for a moment and cleared his throat.

"Get on with it, father," said Marjorie Ede. "Helmut won't report us to Herr Himmler and his secret police."

"I should like to ask our friend here," said Lord Stanfield, "what defence he can give us—I dare say there must be one—for Herr Hitler going back on the Munich Agreement and annexing Czechoslovakia contrary to all his

pledges to our Prime Minister, and his assurance to his own people. Did he not say he had no more territorial claims and didn't want the Czechs and so forth?"

"You're up against it, Helmut!" said Anne with a laugh. "What have you to say about it?"

Helmut von Metsen had a good deal to say about it, at first quietly and always courteously, but with a little warmth when he was heckled by the company at table.

"I think perhaps Mr. Chamberlain paid too much attention to the politeness of our Führer, who did not want to hurt his feelings—the feelings of an old gentleman who had come such a long way to see him. He spoke kind words, not meant to be written down in the Book of Fate."

"No, I'm afraid that won't do, Helmut," said Anne. "They were written down and signed by Hitler. He repeated them to the German people. They were his words of honour, if he has any honour, as I used to believe."

Helmut shrugged his shoulders and laughed nervously. "Words!" he said. "Has not England ever broken her word? To the Arabs? To the Jews? To the Greeks? A thousand times in history. Excuse me. We are talking frankly are we not?"

"We won't go back into past history," said Mr. Vivian Merston, somewhat impatiently. "We want to know, sir, if there is any reasonable explanation of Hitler's action—even from the German point of view."

It was then that Helmut showed a slight warmth of feeling.

"It is entirely reasonable from the German point of view," he said. "First of all we believe that the Führer always knows best what is best for Germany and world peace."

"The blind faith of hero-worship," said young Marjorie. "Divine honours."

"Secondly," said Helmut, ignoring that child. "We regard the Munich settlement as having left a thorn in our side. It began to hurt. Hitler plucked it out."

"I don't follow," said Lord Stanfield.

"Nor do I," said Anne. "I don't see any blinding light."

"Czechoslovakia was a festering sore," said Helmut. "It was crowded with Communists and enemies of Germany, closely in touch with Russia, and conspiring with revolutionaries within the German Reich. It was a great peril on our flank and in our immediate neighbourhood."

"Come, come," said Lord Stanfield good-naturedly. "You can't make me believe that the mighty German Reich had any fear of the remnants of Czechoslovakia. A nation of 80,000,000 against a poor rabble."

"It was a moral danger," said Helmut. "If one poisons one's finger it may infest one's whole body. But in any case the Führer was asked by the Czech Government to intervene and protect them, and create a state of law and order in a nation of anarchy."

"Isn't that the new technique?" asked Robin Bramley from the other side of the table. "German propaganda inflames a small group within a State which calls for the nice, kind help of Hitler to save them from atrocities and brutalities. Hitler being a nice kind man immediately answers the call with squadrons of bombing aeroplanes, tanks and armoured cars. Order reigns in Warsaw."

Helmut von Metsen shrugged his shoulders again.

"That, no doubt, is very humorous," he said. "Yes, I see the humour of it. But it does not alter facts. The fact is I have it on reliable authority that Dr. Hacha, the Czech President, appealed to Hitler because his Government was menaced by revolutionary movements on the Left—with murderous intent—and a military revolt on the Right which threatened to overthrow the Government and rule the country by blood and iron."

"It's curious," said Vivian Merston, the Elder Statesman, "that no such information, not even a rumour of it, has reached our Foreign Office. Why didn't Dr. Hacha send a call to our own Prime Minister?"

"Hear, hear!" said Anne. "That's what I would like to know."

"Perhaps he didn't think the call would be answered," said Helmut with a touch of irony. "England has not been very active in going to the rescue of nations who demand her urgent aid—or even to her nationals in China. England——" He did not continue the thought in his mind.

"Yes?" asked Anne warningly. "England . . ."

Elisabeth von Metsen spoke passionately.

"Helmut and I love England!" she cried. "We love the English people. All this is very painful to us."

"It hurts us more than it hurts you, Elisabeth darling," said Anne sweetly. "It's leading us into a lot of unnecessary expense. And if war comes——"

"It won't come!" cried Elisabeth almost tearfully. "It can't come. Hitler is for peace. The whole German people stand for peace."

"Unless, of course," added Helmut quietly, "we are attacked. Unless we find ourselves encircled."

Robin Bramley had something to say.

"A little bit of encirclement may be necessary," he suggested. "When a river bursts its banks it has to be dammed."

"Encirclement," said Helmut with a sombre look in his eye, "would be regarded very gravely in Germany. It is our old fear. It is our ancient grudge. Such a policy would play into the hands of Dr. Goebbels."

He was aware of a glance exchanged between an ex-Cabinet Minister and a peer of the realm who was his host.

"Well, well!" said Lord Stanfield.

The conversation shifted on to another line of thought. It was suggested by the vicar of St. Peter's.

"I am a man of peace," he said. "I believe in spiritual weapons. Those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword. That is to say I see nothing but evil in this frightful

competition of armaments which threatens to destroy the world's youth and all beauty and intelligence. Is Force democracy's only answer to dictatorship? The answer of bombing aeroplanes to bombing aeroplanes? Mass murder against mass murder? Is it coming to that? Then I find no comfort in the thought, however strong we are or whoever wins. Surely there is some other way out, by the spirit and by human intelligence which is guided by the spirit?"

"Are you a whole-hog pacifist, Padre?" asked Lady Marjorie inquiringly.

He laughed at her way of putting it.

"Well, I wouldn't call myself that! It doesn't sound nice. But I think almost anything is better than a world war."

"The loss of honour? The loss of self-respect?" asked Lady Stanfield.

The vicar of St. Peter's raised his hands slightly.

"I was a chaplain in the last war," he said. "I was on the Somme and up at Ypres. Somehow or other honour and self-respect seemed to have gone out of our thoughts before the end came. It was overwhelmed by human agony. One saw only the monstrous folly of it all."

"Do you want us to lie down and be trampled on?" asked the Right Hon. Vivian Merston. "Do you want us to abandon our Empire and haul down the flag with all its responsibilities to other nations and other peoples? That would lead to rivers of blood."

"I want the spirit of peace to prevail," said the vicar. "At the moment the whole world is thinking of war, preparing for war, and moving—perhaps rushing—towards the horror which they all abhor. There does not seem to me any sense in that."

For a moment there was silence in the room as if the spectre of war had touched them with its icy finger.

"I agree, Padre," said Robin Bramley. "Modern warfare is not like the gentlemanly affrays of the eighteenth

century. It has become very vulgar. But how do you propose to avoid it? Shall we all write love-letters to little Adolf, asking him to be a good boy?"

The Rev. John Hackett, that ascetic-looking man with snow-white hair and vivid eyes, smiled at him and then became thoughtful as though wrestling inwardly with this problem of spiritual force against high explosive power.

"We might write love-letters to the German people," he suggested. "That is to say we might try to get into closer touch with them and make them aware of our peaceful intentions and good will, and desire to live in peace with them without thwarting their vital interests. I'm trying to persuade the B.B.C. to let me give a talk to the German people—in German, of course, which I know pretty well. I was at Heidelberg for some time as a young man."

"Not a bad idea," said Lord Stanfield. "Don't you agree?"

He turned to Helmut von Metsen with this inquiry.

For a moment Helmut's fair skin flushed and then he spoke rather emotionally.

"I do not agree, sir! It would be a fatal mistake if English people, with whatever good intentions, tried to drive a wedge between the German folk and their leaders. They would react to that in quite the opposite way. And may I protest—pardon me—against this moral attitude of the English in regard to Germany? We dislike it very much. We think it's extremely hypocritical, if I may say so without offence."

It was Anne Ede who answered him.

"I'm not quite sure whether you can say so without offence," she told him warningly.

It was rash of him to ignore that warning.

"England—and I may add the United States," he continued, "have adopted the old English governess attitude towards Germany. Surely their own history and character do not justify so much self-righteousness? Doubtless there are things in the Nazi régime which are open to

criticism—I see them very clearly—but they may be excused somewhat by our recent revolution. I fail to understand—excuse me—why England, above all peoples, should give moral lectures when the story of their own Empire is, to say the least of it, not entirely founded upon justice or lack of violence. As for the United States, we read things now and again which shock our German minds—their lynch law, their graft, their prison brutalities, their Ku Klux Klan, their low standards of political morality. Forgive me if I say these things, but as Germany is constantly attacked in the British Press I feel compelled to put up a defence.”

It was Anne who took up the challenge again.

“I don’t know why you want to drag in the United States,” she said, “but on behalf of England, Helmut, I wish to say that I don’t like your way of putting it. We are not going back into Germany’s dark, uncivilized past, in its pagan forests or mediaeval torture chambers. We’re discussing the Germany of today and Hitler’s betrayal of his pledged words, and his threats to other people’s frontiers.”

“What threat, dear lady?” asked Helmut. “I thought you were a friend of Germany and advocated a spirit of understanding.”

“I’m not a friend of those who break their word,” said Anne, looking him in the eyes with a dangerous smile. “I’m not a friend of Dr. Goebbels with his vile abuse of England and the English.”

“It’s tit-for-tat, Lady Anne,” said Helmut with an uneasy laugh. “He answers the abuse of your own press.”

“Our press is mealy-mouthed compared to his disgusting articles,” said Anne. “I happen to have read some of them. They are horrible. They’re unforgivable.”

“But, Anne dear,” cried Elisabeth, “you must not judge Germany by the words of Dr. Goebbels.”

“He has a lot of influence,” said Anne. “Germans are having their minds poisoned by him.”

"No more than England by its Duff Coopers and Winston Churchills," said Helmut with a challenging laugh.

"I don't agree," said Anne coldly. "And I think your defence of Hitler's betrayal of Mr. Chamberlain is either insincere, or the revelation of a state of mind which I think deplorable, Helmut."

"I do not admit the betrayal," said Helmut warmly.

"Then you don't admit any standard of honour," said Anne with a flash of lightning in her eyes.

Helmut von Metsen flushed hotly and then went white. He looked like a man who had been slashed across the face by a whip.

"Really!" he said.

"Anne!" cried Elisabeth tearfully.

"Mother," said Anne in her clear, bell-like voice. "Shall we go into the drawing-room?"

"I think it's time," said Lady Stanfield. "This room is getting a little hot, isn't it?"

It was Helmut who sprang to his feet to open the dining-room door. Lady Stanfield held Elisabeth's hand and led her out. Judy followed with Marjorie, who seemed to be amused. Anne was last among the ladies to leave the room, passing Helmut without a glance and with a spot of colour on each cheek and a dark look in her eyes.

"Well," said Vivian Merston with an uneasy laugh.

"Women never can argue dispassionately," said Lord Stanfield. "Pass the port, Frank. What were you saying, Vicar?"

John Barton, the one American among these men, felt an inward and unholy satisfaction. So Anne had wiped the floor with Helmut von Metsen who once had asked her to marry him, and to whom she had been attracted for a time. A very pleasant and interesting little dinner-party, he thought. He gave full marks—hundred per cent—to Anne's intelligence and spirit. It was like a scene in a play by Will Shakespeare brought up to date. Anne was like one of Shakespeare's women, though he couldn't remember

which, unless it was the passionate Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Suddenly, being a young man of kind heart and chivalrous disposition, he felt sorry for the young German who sat very silent after a knock-out blow.

"Is it true that there's any food shortage in Germany?" he asked pleasantly.

"Quite untrue," said Helmut sharply. "It is one of the lies in the English and American Press."

Further conversation was difficult. John sipped his lordship's port, while Robin Bramley did his best to ease the situation.

"Anne looks beautiful when she's angry," thought John.

X

HELMUT and Elisabeth left rather early under the plea of having to go on to a reception at the German Embassy. The Rev. John Hackett also made his excuses for going. He had to rise every morning at six for his first service. Vivian Merston followed suit after a formal little speech to Lady Stanfield whom he called Alice, and then some smiling words to Anne.

"I'm afraid the conversation at table became a little heated," he said. "But I must say I agreed with every word you said, my dear."

"Helmut made me feel rather vexed," said Anne. "Perhaps I ought not to have flared out so much."

"He asked for it," said Merston. "And it's best to be frank. What staggers me is that charming and intelligent Germans like that young couple can't see anything wrong in Hitler's annexation of the Czechs against all his previous pledges. Baffling! Alarming!"

"Well, this party seems to be breaking up," said Lady Stanfield. "If you young people can carry on without me, which seems highly probable, I'll take the opportunity of writing a few letters."

John and Judy had previously noticed that English hostesses seemed to spend a great deal of time in writing letters, mostly of a business nature.

"Anybody for a game of pills?" asked the eldest son of the family who had been showing signs of acute boredom.

Robin and Judy accepted his invitation to the billiard-room. David, who had arrived after dinner in time for coffee, joined them. Anne was left alone in the drawing-room with John Barton when Lord Stanfield told them that

he had caught an infernal cold, and proposed to put his feet in hot water and mustard. He sneezed with great violence after this announcement.

"God bless you!" cried Anne, like her ancestors in the time of plague.

"Well," said John, after the old gentleman had departed. "I must say this is terribly pleasant."

Anne smiled at him from her place on a big, chintz-covered sofa facing the fire. "Aren't you of a sociable nature?" she asked. "Don't you mind being left alone by the entire family whose manners seem to me very remiss tonight."

"I hate loneliness," said John. "But another human soul is company enough for me, especially when I like that human soul."

He sat on a low stool covered with tapestry work, done, no doubt, by some lady of the Ede family in the early days of Queen Victoria.

Anne suddenly laughed, not at his remark but at some thought of her own.

"My manners at table," she said, "were shocking. I feel very guilty about it. But didn't Helmut ask for trouble?"

"He certainly did," said John, smiling at her from his low place with his hands clasped round his knees. "And thank God and Anne Ede, he got it properly."

"After all, he was a guest at my father's table," said Anne, as though her conscience were biting her. "And I love Elisabeth so much. I don't think I ought to have got hot like that."

John felt an inward delight that she hadn't included Elisabeth's brother in her profession of love. He felt very much relieved about that.

"Anne," he said, "I'm glad you've got over your morbid affection for German Nazis. It used to worry me a good deal. I couldn't reconcile it with your English tradition which draws the line at Jew-baiting and the suppression of free thought and free speech."

Anne fluttered her eyelids at him for a moment.

"I'm sorry you were worried," she told him. "But didn't we use to argue that out in Berlin? I seem to remember telling you that I had a little mission in the world. I wanted, as far as I could, to help on the way of understanding between England and Germany for the sake of peace."

"A hopeless quest!" said John. "The more you understand the German mentality, the less you like them. Didn't I tell you so in Berlin? And wasn't I right?"

"You Americans are so intolerant!" said Anne. "Who was it said you can't indict a whole nation? But you Americans do so all the time. Because you don't like the Nazi régime—any more than we do!—you think that every German must be a bully or a spy. In England we know that the great mass of the German people remain good-natured and have the same horror of war that we have."

"Helmut von Metsen didn't show any great horror of war tonight," argued John. "He talked rather grimly of what would happen if Germany were encircled. He's a hundred per cent Nazi."

Anne made a little allowance for him.

"I dare say one always defends one's own country, right or wrong," she remarked. "I dare say if I went to New York again I should resent any criticism of England."

"You wouldn't hear it," said John. "Not in my company."

"I've noticed that Americans get rather hot under the collar," said Anne, pursuing her line of thought, "if one makes a little gibe now and then about habits and customs in the United States."

"That's so," admitted John. "I don't deny it. But one doesn't defend groups of bandits who have taken possession of one's nation and hold it down by machine-guns and secret police."

"You leave out the hero-worship," said Anne. "To most of the younger Germans those 'bandits' as you call

them are the leaders who liberated them from humiliation and their inferiority complex. I try to be fair—even to the Nazis.”

“It’s your sense of English fairness which is so darned dangerous,” said John. “You can’t be fair with impunity to the spirit of evil. It was because your Mr. Chamberlain thought he was being fair at Munich that he got let down so heavily, as now we see by what has happened.”

“What’s going to happen?” asked Anne, looking at this American with thoughtful eyes. “Is it going to be war, do you think?”

“If England stands up instead of lying down,” said John.

She raised one finger at him warningly.

“Now then, none of that! I don’t want two quarrels tonight.”

“You couldn’t make one with me, Anne,” said John earnestly. “I’m a passionate fellow in my love of England and English beauty.”

She smiled at him under her eyelashes—that funny little trick of hers.

“I’m glad you fell in love with England,” she said. “When are you going back, if you have to go back?”

“At the end of next month,” he told her; “and I hate the idea of going back alone.”

“Who do you want to go with you?” she asked with apparent innocence and a deliberate lack of grammar.

“I’d like you to come,” he said, feeling his heart leap over a precipice. “Any chance, Anne? We’d be going to a nice safe country beyond the war zone. We’d pluck ‘this flower, safety’ in Elysian fields. If you didn’t like living in New York or Washington——”

She didn’t let him get farther than that.

“Nothing doing, John!” she said. “If there’s a war I shall be here. Do you think I should be happy in the United States reading about the bombing of babies in London, and the massacre of civilians, among whom might

be my father and mother, and all the people I love? Is that your American idea of the English spirit?"

"Well," said John stubbornly, "I don't see why you should be buried deliberately under the ruins of Belgrave Place when you could get away from this hell's kitchen and dwell in a land of peace and harmony. Your beauty, Anne, ought not to be hidden by a gas mask. Believe me, your loveliness wasn't intended by God to be torn to ribbons by bits of flying steel. No, sir! If you'd come with me, I'd give you a safe roof over your head, even if you happened to be at the top of a skyscraper in New York. See what I mean?"

She didn't see any meaning in what he meant.

"That would be cowardice," she said to him. "Do you think I want to escape when England's in danger? English women aren't like that, John."

He saw that he had made a hideous *gaffe* because of his very love for her, because he hated the idea that she should be in the firing line if war happened.

"You get me all wrong," he said. "I mean for a month or two while we're having a honeymoon. I mean directly things looked threatening over here we'd take the first boat back even if German aeroplanes were bombing Southampton as we landed."

"German aeroplanes aren't going to bomb Southampton," laughed Anne with sudden inconsistency, completely disregarding her previous words which had suggested a sense of apprehension. "There's not going to be a war. It's all newspaper stuff! Hitler wants everything without a war. He knows he can't risk it. They all know it."

"Well, then, that's fine," said John, hiding his disbelief in this optimism. "If there's not going to be any war there's nothing against you coming with me to the United States and having a perfectly happy time. See what I mean, Anne? You and me. Hand in hand. With a great adventure ahead."

"Are you making a proposal of marriage?" she asked. "Or do you want me to live with you in sin?"

He was terribly shocked. He felt very sore that she could say such a thing.

"Anne," he said emotionally. "Haven't I been following you about like the Hound of Heaven or the Hound of the Baskervilles? Haven't you broken my heart in Berlin, Rome, Paris and London? Haven't I asked you to marry me a score of times?"

"No," she said. "I don't think so. I can't remember it. I always interrupted you just as you were getting too close."

"Well, I'm asking you now," said John.

Anne glanced at him again with a little smile which was like that of Mona Lisa, he thought.

"The King and Queen are going to America," she said irrelevantly. "And there's the World's Fair in New York. It might be amusing."

"More than amusing," said John, seizing at these straws—"exciting, tremendous, historical."

"David has a chance of being sent to Washington," said Anne. "I've been pulling strings for him. We have an uncle out there."

"Well then, it's all settled," said John with quiet enthusiasm. "We'll get married at St. Margaret's, Westminster, and we can both go out with young David and keep an eye on him. Allah is great and Mohammed is his prophet."

Anne laughed with real amusement.

"John Barton," she said, "you're like an American on the movies. England hasn't left its mark on you."

"You're breaking my heart again," he said despairingly. She looked sorry for him.

"Poor dear John!" she said. "I hate being cruel like this. Is your heart really broken in small bits? Does it really hurt in the right place on the left side?"

"Like hell it does!" he told her.

"Why do you love me so much?" she asked. "I'm not worth it. I'm not your style, John. Honest Injun!"

"I like your style," he assured her. "I fell for you in the *Queen Mary* a thousand years ago."

"Why yes," she said. "You've been a constant swain. I will admit that. You've followed me about like a knight errant with a fountain-pen. I suppose I shall have to yield one of these days. I can't go on being cruel. I'm not as hard-hearted as all that."

"What's that?" asked John, not believing his own ears. "Anne! What are you talking about?"

"Our formal engagement," said Anne. "Our trip to the United States. I mean if you're really so keen about it as all that, and promise to come back if anything happens to old England."

"Anne," said John in a low voice, "I've been praying for a miracle. It's happened."

He caught hold of her hands.

"Anne, say that you love me, just once. Say that you're not teasing the heart out of me."

She leaned forward until her face met his.

"You've been waiting a long time, John," she said. "You've been very patient. I can't help loving you for it."

It was a pity that the drawing-room door opened just then. It was David who came in, searching for a cigarette-box.

"Oh, David," said Anne in a casual kind of voice. "John Barton and I are coming to Washington with you, if you get that job."

"Why, that's splendid," he said, not greatly excited.

He went towards the door with the silver cigarette-box.

"David," said Anne. "I'm officially engaged to an American journalist named John Barton."

David started slightly, and turned back to look at them where now they stood hand in hand.

"Good God!" he said, greatly surprised.

XI

THERE was a coming and going of diplomats, foreign statesmen, military and naval experts and unofficial visitors to Whitehall and Downing Street. The American Ambassador abandoned his family of eight and called frequently at No. 10. A black-bearded, square-shouldered little man, who was Soviet Ambassador in London, was received many times at the Foreign Office by a tall, ascetic-looking man who had a great share in shaping the policy of His Majesty's Government, if, as critics of the Opposition gravely doubted, His Majesty's Government had any foreign policy beyond that of surrender to pressure of dictatorships and the betrayal of their own cherished liberties. The British Ambassador in Berlin had been recalled to report, and in due course faced a battery of cameras awaiting his arrival. He looked a tired man, and, it was reported, a sick man. Some newspapers announced that he was a broken man, and would never be sent back to Berlin because of his blinding failure. He had staked his career upon an understanding with Germany for the sake of European peace. He had made personal friends with General Goering, whom he believed to be on the side of peace and friendship with England in spite of his flaming speeches not without menace. This Ambassador had believed that Hitler, whom he knew, had definite limits to his ambitions—the limitation of his own racial theory which would not go beyond the union of German folk.

At every great Nazi rally in Germany he had sat in one of the front seats in an English top hat which he raised slightly when Nazi banners were carried by. During the September crisis of the previous year he had gone without

food and sleep, seeing, as he believed, the breakdown of all his work, until only two and a half hours remained between the world and war. During recent years he had written dispatch after dispatch warning his Government of Germany's increasing armaments and urging them to establish peaceful relations with the new régime before it became too powerful and hostile. He had deplored the incessant attacks of the English Left-Wing Press on Hitler and all his works—that daily stream of criticism, sinister and often unfounded rumours, and inflammatory abuse which was answered immediately by still more violent fulminations against England in the German Press, under the control of a poisonous and poisoned mind. A grave, hatchet-faced, soldierly man, he was marked down by the Left Wing in England as a friend of dictatorship and under the spell of Hitler and the Nazi creed. They gave him no credit for any nobility of purpose in peace-making to save Europe, if he could, from a collision of terrific forces which would lead to the almighty smash and great death and great ruin. Now he came back to London, a sick man, perhaps also a heart-broken one. Adolf had let him down by going beyond the framework of his racial faith and by repudiating his pledges.

The lights in the Foreign Office were burning late. Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, had no colour in his mask-like face and no rest between his meals. Dispatches, notes, deciphered codes from many countries were put before him by his secretaries. Europe was in a state of alarm because of the annexation of Bohemia and reports of threats and blackmail to other states. Some new policy was being shaped behind the scenes to deal with this menace of further aggression. Chamberlain's speech at Birmingham had foreshadowed it. In South-east Europe, kings and princes and ministers of State were in consultation with each other, or in secret conspiracy against each other. The Scandinavian countries were getting anxious and strengthening their defences.

Was it all a nightmare of fear unjustified by fact and created by false news, as the German leaders asserted and the German people believed? Poland did not think so. The Poles were sending their Colonel Beck to London on an urgent mission for immediate aid. Rumania did not think so when they were confronted by a German offer for a commercial treaty which, if accepted, would, they thought, make them a vassal State to the German Reich. Greece and Turkey were getting alarmed. Their Ambassadors at the Court of St. James were having long and earnest conversations with the British Foreign Secretary. What did it all mean? What new combination of forces would be revealed? What new moves on the political chessboard? In Downing Street crowds gathered to watch all this coming and going outside Number 10. They were crowds of anxious-faced men and women who knew that the fate of themselves and their children hung in the balance during these days.

Their nerves were being kept on edge, and their sense of drama stimulated by the wireless, the newsreel, and the sensational press. Prophetic voices warned them of immediate peril to their own households in a world full of menace. One voice, deep in gloomy apprehension, could not be ignored because of words printed in heavy type on the front pages of morning newspapers, read in third-class railway carriages and over the marble-topped tables of tea-shops and eating-houses.

"Why," asked Mr. Winston Churchill, "do you suppose we are making all these preparations for defence? Why do you suppose the French military service has been lengthened? Why, do you suppose, have we promised to send nineteen divisions to the Continent? Because in the destruction of Czechoslovakia the entire balance of Europe is shattered. The great and growing German Army is now free to turn in any direction: we do not know in what direction it will turn." He had a right to say—he did not fail to say it—"I warned the country before it happened."

In France there were new and poignant anxieties. Mussolini was demanding colonial territories now under French rule. Hitler, they thought, had thrown off the mask. His annexation of the Czechs would be followed by the violation of other frontiers, or the undermining of other States. Poland would be the next victim. Where was French security?

"Time for speech is past," said M. Daladier, the French Premier, demanding and obtaining plenary powers, undefined and therefore unlimited, to govern France by decree in this time of crisis.

"The country has its back to the wall," he said. "There must be no further retreat. We must only go forward. The safety of the Republic is in question, and nothing now matters but to preserve the only thing worth while to men of any country—a great ideal of liberty and justice."

He was abolishing liberty in France—at least the liberty of Parliamentary criticism and delay—in order to defend it—a strange paradox which confronts democracies when they are challenged by dictatorship.

French voices were heard in London during these days. French visitors arrived by boat and air. It was when President Lebrun came to London with his wife on an official visit. It was in return for that of the young King and Queen who had captured the heart of Paris. This visit of the French President came at a time when the necessity for Anglo-French union for all purposes of defence was acknowledged by the man in the street, who turned out in his thousands to raise a cheer when these representatives of France went on their way to the Guildhall to be received with all the old tradition of the City.

XII

JOHN BARTON was standing in the courtyard of the Guildhall where a military band played the Marseillaise and, while he stood with his hat off watching the departure of the President on his return to Buckingham Palace, he thought how extraordinary it was that this old song, which first had been sung by ragged men inflamed by the fire of revolution on their way to Paris, where later the guillotine lopped off many noble heads, should now be the national anthem of a bourgeois Republic and respectfully saluted by English generals, and admirals, and judges, and bishops, in the presence of English Royalty. All those people were now coming out of the Guildhall in splendid uniforms glittering with decorations.

John Barton, after a slight historical reminiscence, had been thinking of other matters, equally strange and even more fantastic, though not of such great importance to the rest of the world. In the Guildhall he had felt a heavy hand on his shoulder for a moment and had looked round to see Anne's father in some very noble-looking uniform of scarlet and gold, with a long row of medals on his broad chest.

"Hullo, Barton!" he said genially. "I'm afraid Anne misbehaved herself last night. What a wonderful life you journalists have. Go everywhere and see everything. I wouldn't mind being one myself if anyone would give me the job and I had the brains to do it."

He passed on among a group of naval and military men, while John acquired a little social glamour at the Press table.

"Didn't know you were on friendly terms with our

ancient aristocracy," said an English newspaper man with some irony.

John concealed the astonishing fact, still unbelievable even to himself, that he might one day be the son-in-law of that imposing-looking figure, the Earl of Stanfield.

But now in the courtyard of the Guildhall he turned suddenly at the touch of a hand on his shoulder and an exclamation in French :

"Comment donc ! C'est certainement mon ami Barton. Quelle chance !"

"What's all that mean in English ?" he asked, and then recognized a young Frenchman named Paul de Brissac whom he had met many times in Paris. He was a relative of another young Frenchman who had married John's sister Lucy, once of Massachusetts and now, if you please, Madame de Maresquel and mother of a French babe.

"Hullo, friend !" exclaimed John, not without pleasure at this meeting. Paul de Brissac had impressed him favourably as a young man of high intelligence and first-class quality. "What are you doing over here ?"

Paul de Brissac looked amused and mysterious.

"A free trip to England," he said. "All expenses paid ! For the moment the English climate belies its reputation. I see a pallid gleam of sun. Where do we talk ? There are many things to say since we sat outside the Dôme in Montparnasse. How is your enchanting Judy ?"

"My enchanting Judy is engaged to an impecunious Englishman and thinks it a great joke," said John.

"And yourself ?" asked de Brissac. "You are married ? You have a mistress ?"

"Neither," said John, with a sudden laugh at this French view of life. "But there's no knowing what may happen one day."

He laughed at what might happen one day if Anne went on being so wonderful.

"Better get out of this crowd," he suggested. "We'll take a taxi to a club of which I have the honour of being

a member. It has a smoking-room which looks on to a back yard, where there's a gleam of sunlight. If you don't drink English tea you can drink English coffee."

Paul de Brissac made a humorous grimace.

"They are both poisonous!" he cried. "But I will smoke French cigarettes and ask many questions."

It happened according to John's programme. From the window of the smoking-room of a club in Pall Mall they could see the gardens of Carlton House Terrace which provided some unexpected sunshine, and John ordered two cups of coffee which Paul de Brissac said reminded him, however distantly, of coffee. He sat with his black felt hat on one knee while he smoked an American cigarette in return for one of his *Petit Caporals*. For a moment or two he was interested in one or two groups of Englishmen who sat in deep leather chairs not far from them.

Two of them were talking rather loudly as though on a golf course with the wind blowing.

"This Government of ours makes me see red," one said. "They go clucking about like a lot of old hens frightened by the smell of a fox. As for these air raid precautions, they're utterly useless and just eyewash for the mob. Why don't they get on with some bomb-proof shelters?"

"My dear fellow," said the other man, "our Civil Service is the best in the world. They're doing a lot of quiet work behind the scenes, I can assure you. Every detail has been worked out for the evacuation of children."

"The evacuation of children!" exclaimed the other man scornfully. "What we want is a fleet of bombers to put the fear of God into Berlin. I'm told our Air Force is still in a hopeless state of inefficiency."

"I can't believe it," said the other man. "We're reaching the production stage. Every day is in our favour, don't you think? Of course I agree that most of our Ministers ought to be shot."

De Brissac, who had been for four years at the French Embassy in London, listened to this English conversation

with a smile until one of the men observed his interest and lowered his voice.

"The English have one—and perhaps only one—characteristic in common with the French," observed de Brissac. "They are all critics of their Government."

"The test of civilization and liberty," said John. "It isn't allowed in the Dictatorship States. If they happened to be Germans' talking like that they would be reported to Herr Himmler and driven off to the nearest concentration camp."

Paul de Brissac, a dark-haired fellow, who reminded Barton of his imaginary portrait of d'Artagnan, revealed the reason for his English visit.

"I'm part of a French military mission. My uncle, who is in our French War Office, pulled a few strings for me. It is one of the advantages of the French political system, which is otherwise open to much criticism, that there are still strings to pull. But after all a miracle has happened in France."

"The Angels of Mons?" asked John with his American scepticism.

"Mons, my dear fellow, is in Belgium," said Paul de Brissac. "But there is an archangel in Paris. His name is Daladier."

"Wasn't he one of the authors of the Munich Agreement?" asked John. "Looking at what has happened during the past week, isn't it generally agreed that Munich was one of the major mistakes of history?"

He was astonished by de Brissac's version of that affair.

"On the contrary! It saved France from annihilation. If it hadn't been for Daladier, France would have been involved in war at a time when we were utterly unprepared for it, and when our economic and political condition was in a fearful state. We had no Air Force, owing to the deplorable handicap of the forty hours week and ceaseless industrial disputes, to say nothing of the treasonable

conduct of politicians. French politics had degenerated into a dog-fight of rival factions in which the interest of France was forgotten. Daladier had only one idea in his mind when he went to Munich. It was to avoid war and to gain time. He was desperately afraid that Chamberlain, under the pressure of his Opposition and American public opinion, would lead both our nations into conflict with Germany."

"American public opinion?" asked John, with a sceptical laugh. "I can't pass that."

"*Ciel!*" exclaimed de Brissac. "It is very dangerous—your American public opinion. It comes to us through your ambassadors and many other sources. Naturally we do not wish to offend it. We need American munitions, American aeroplanes, and if possible the repeal of the American neutrality laws. But meanwhile American journalists, who create public opinion in your great country, insist that England and France should stand up to the Dictators and plunge into war even at the cost of rivers of blood from the last battalions of our youth. It is very embarrassing."

John laughed good-naturedly.

"You misinterpret the American viewpoint," he protested.

Paul de Brissac shrugged his shoulders slightly and smiled.

"Perhaps! But as I was saying, Daladier has revealed himself a strong man. He had the strength to avoid war at an unfavourable moment. He has the strength now to organize the whole nation for a war which may have to come. Since last September he has undoubtedly worked miracles, or indeed a series of miracles. Our finances have been put on a stronger basis. He has made a call to the old spirit of France above the heads of those little politicians. France has answered him—our old France—our traditional France—which is in the blood and soul of our people in spite of the corruption of the political arena."

"Fine!" said John.

"Now," said Paul de Brissac thoughtfully, "he has demanded full powers of control in a time of national emergency. He has been granted them after a severe battle with the Extreme Left. France has found her strong man at last. *Grâce à dieu!*"

He glanced over at the groups of men in the comfortable chairs of an English club.

"What about these English?" he asked. "They do not seem to understand. They are perhaps incapable of understanding. They go on with their week-end golf. They play their ball games while the rest of Europe is marching and drilling. They lounge in these comfortable club chairs while Hitler gets ready for his *Blitz-krieg*. They take their afternoon tea while French youth mans the Maginot Line."

John glanced over his shoulder nervously lest anyone should be listening.

"You're unjust to them," he answered. "As an American observer, I can tell you that England isn't lying down. The call to National Service has had a mighty fine response. English boys are crowding into the Territorials. The civilians are getting busy with air raid precautions. Millions of gas masks have been distributed."

His answer seemed to irritate this Frenchman.

"Playing at soldiers!" he answered. "Amateurs *versus* professionals. France will not think England is serious until they bring in conscription for military service."

John Barton shook his head.

"They won't do that," he said, with the dogmatism of a man who knew his England well. "It's all against their tradition. It's against their idea of liberty. Mr. Chamberlain has given his word that he won't stand for it without a general election."

Paul de Brissac raised his hands—the delicate blue-veined hands of a French intellectual.

"Then the case is hopeless and England is incapable of fulfilling her pledges. European civilization will go down

in the coming struggle with the Goths and Vandals. It is the end of the Christian era. The Cross will go down before the Swastika. *Tout est fini, mon vieux !*"

"How do you make that out?" asked John, rather shocked. "I call that over-pessimistic."

Paul de Brissac spoke in a low voice, leaning forward a little in his chair.

"France," he said, "has not the necessary number of men to defend herself on three fronts. That is the long and short of it. We shall have to hold the Italians, who are not to be despised. We shall have to defend the Maginot Line. Now with Franco's victory in Spain we shall have to defend the Pyrenees. Hitler and Mussolini will exact payment for their legionaries, their Air Force, their tanks. Spain will go Fascist and join the Axis. We cannot defend France if English youth continues to play cricket on the village greens. My chief has come to urge the necessity of conscription as the first and immediate step in our common defence."

"Your chief," said John, "is on a hopeless quest. The English believe they can do everything on the volunteer system."

"The English are a very agreeable people," said Paul de Brissac. "I admire their qualities, which are charming. They understand the art of life. But they do not understand the science of war nor the immediate menace to civilization. They are still islanders. They still have the mind of islanders though their Channel is now only a narrow puddle."

"I fear I must be going," he announced. "I bring all kinds of messages from your sister Lucy and her husband Louis, who is, as you know, my first cousin."

It was a polite hint that he expected to be invited to dinner one evening. John asked him to dinner.

XIII

WHILE her brother was going about his business as a professional observer of international affairs and English life with a private dream of his own, and the nagging thought that time was against him, Judy Barton was in her own way a student of the same subject with particular attention to one English type of character represented by Robin Bramley, R.I., of Susan Street Mews, Knightsbridge.

She made certain discoveries about him which were important, she thought, to her future happiness. One of them was the revelation that underneath his gaiety and humour—his insistence upon the importance of laughter—was a moody and melancholy mind. It was, he said, due to an Irish grandmother who, like all the Irish, have a strain of dark and mystical yearning for the unattainable and the inexplicable, and who see fairies in full daylight.

“That lady,” he told her once—“I only remember her as a charming old woman who played Beggar-my-Neighbour with me when I was a small boy staying at her house in Dublin—is responsible for my present squalor and future distress. It’s the Irish blood in me which has kept me painting pictures which nobody will buy and pursuing a dream of beauty beyond my farthest reach. Curse the old witch for casting that spell upon my English cradle!”

Judy’s practical mind did not believe much of that story. She could see that he was worried about his lack of success, due, as once he had said, to an age which was unfavourable to art. Luck had been dead against him lately. Since the September crisis he had not sold a picture nor received any commission for one of his portraits. The provincial mayor had been his last catch. No other

mayor desired to be painted in his robes and chain of office. No retired general could afford to don his uniform and decorations in order to bequeath a family ancestor to posterity. No mother of a society débutante appeared in Susan Street Mews with a girl in Court dress whose fresh young beauty was worthy of Robin Bramley's artful brush. For some reason unknown to artists, and not perfectly understood by economists, the international crisis had tightened all purses and no one spent an unnecessary shilling. In such times the artist, the poet and the house-painter are regarded as the first luxuries to be cut off. Robin Bramley was one of the victims of Czechoslovakia, the Polish Corridor, and other troublesome situations in Central Europe which, according to the papers, would probably cause world war by the following Monday morning, or possibly Tuesday week.

"Judy, my plain but beautiful one," said Robin one afternoon, "I'm getting worried. I can't think of a single wisecrack from my Book of Jests."

She had seen that he was worried. For half an hour, while she had been in his studio cleaning his brushes and tidying up a little, he had not spoken a single word, but had lain on his dilapidated sofa at full stretch, staring up at the ceiling from which the plaster had fallen here and there.

"What's your worry, Robin?" asked Judy, cheerfully.

"An affair of conscience," he told her. "Robin Bramley is an honourable man. Any stain upon his honour is worse to him than the bite of a gadfly."

"Tell me the point of honour," said Judy, putting ten clean and beautiful brushes into one of his cupboards. "I can't believe that there's any stain upon your escutcheon or your soul, my dear."

He shifted slightly so that he could look at her and send her a smile of amusement at this answer in the tone of his own rodomontade.

"No! Talking quite seriously, I feel that I've done the dirty on you, my little one."

"I'm not aware of it," said Judy. "I'm not complaining. Give me a clue."

"My little one with the funny nose," said Robin, "in a moment of emotional ecstasy coupled with a sense of humour, I asked you to be my wife."

"I know," said Judy. "I'm not going to let you off."

Robin was silent again for a moment and then spoke distressful words.

"My dear girl, I ought not to have asked you. It wasn't playing the game. My only defence is that I was making a little bit of money just then from that purple-faced old robber with the chain round his neck, and from one or two others. It looked as though luck had taken a turn. Since then I haven't earned a bean and all that wealth has departed from me into other people's pockets. My financial state is deplorable."

"Couldn't you have saved a bit?" asked Judy, getting anxious. "Where did it all go to?"

Robin Bramley hedged a little.

"Well, it wasn't a fortune, you know. A few hundred quid. I had to part with some of it to fellow artists and poor relations gravely in need of immediate help."

"You're too generous, Robin," said Judy. "That's what's the matter with you. I suppose you've been handing out your hard-earned wealth to spongers and parasites who prey on your good nature."

"Oh well," said Robin, "when I'm a bit flush I like to hand out a trifle here and there. It's selfishness really. It panders to my self-conceit. But I quite admit I ought to have hoarded those unexpected windfalls."

"When are we going to get married?" asked Judy. She had asked that question more than once lately and he had evaded mentioning an exact date.

He sat up on his sofa and looked dejected and unhappy.

"I don't see how we can get married at all," he told her. "It's no use dallying with the idea. The fact is, Judy, my beloved, I can't even offer you a roof over your head,

nor even a ceiling which ought to be replastered. A most unpleasant fellow called on me yesterday and mentioned the disagreeable fact that I owe him six months' rent for this slum dwelling which, anyhow, is as costly as a mansion in Mayfair. He hinted that if I don't pay up it will be his duty to chuck me out. He had no manners."

"Oh, Robin!" cried Judy, looking frightened.

"Yes, it's like that," said Robin. "And that's why I feel I've done the dirty on you, as they say in this mews."

He looked over to her with a smile.

"We've had some good fun here. We've laughed quite a lot, haven't we? But I think now, Judy, it's time for you to go. I'm keeping you away from other men who could afford to keep you in the lap of luxury. I'm spoiling your chances."

"You're breaking my heart," said Judy.

She went down on her knees by the sofa and flung her arms about him.

"Robin!" she cried. "I love you. I'm not going to give you up. I'm not going to let you off. Poverty doesn't mean anything. It's only love that means anything. I'm ready to starve with you."

He took her face in his hands and kissed it, a tearful face.

"Dear little Judy!" he said. "Bless your American heart! I don't want to give you up. But you see how it is, don't you? We can't camp out on the Embankment or share the sparrows' crumbs in Kensington Gardens. At least not for long, though it might be very pleasant for a day or two, in good weather."

"Do you love me still?" asked Judy. "Or do you want to get rid of me? I want a plain answer to a plain question."

He gave her a plain answer to a plain question.

"I love every little hair on your nicely shaped head, Judy. I love the little dimple at the corner of your mouth when you laugh. I love the tilt of your nose and the fun in your eyes when I make one of my worst jokes. I love

your shyness and your boldness. I love the grace of your body and the charity in your heart. I love the way you handle a brush and your look of horror when you make a mess on your canvas, as all of us do at times when it won't come right. I love the way you walk and the way you move. I love your American intonation which gives a kind of *sauce piquante* to your back answers. I love your enthusiasm for the things you like, and your little secret laughter now and then when you watch our English puppet show. I love the shape of your hands, and the shape of your mind, which is dead straight and dead true. I love your kindness and your courage and your faith and your hope. I love Plain Judy!"

Judy seemed satisfied with this plain answer to a plain question.

"Well then," she said, "what's all the trouble about?"

"The high cost of loving," said Robin. "The disgusting necessity of paying one's butcher's bill."

"We can do without meat," said Judy.

"The baker's bill," said Robin grimly.

"I will bake the bread," said Judy.

"The rent, lady," said Robin. "You're forgetting the rent. And how do we get flour without any pence?"

"All this nonsense about money is quite absurd," said Judy. "Mother is going to make me a little allowance. Besides, I have a wonderful plan. It makes everything perfectly easy."

Robin raised his eyebrows with a look of inquiry.

"Yes? Did you say perfectly easy? I'm waiting to hear."

He had to wait for some time because a visitor arrived at that moment. It was a lovely lady with a fur coat which must have cost her husband quite a lot of money. Judy had seen her before several times. Once she had been in love with Robin. Once even she had broken his heart, though it seemed to be nicely mended now. He disliked her a good deal because she tried to remind him now and

then of the time when he had had a passion for her loveliness. She was a married lady and her name was Vera, Countess of Munstead.

Robin opened the door to her and Judy heard their voices in the passage outside the studio.

"Hallo, Robin darling. What ages since I've seen you!"

"I object to the word 'darling,'" said Robin rather rudely. "What do you want, Vera? My virtue is impregnable, and inside that studio is a young woman with whom I propose to cohabit after a perfectly good marriage service when I can afford to pay the parson's fees."

"It's quite all right," said Vera, Lady Munstead. "I haven't come to seduce you, Robin darling. On the contrary, I've come to see you on a matter of business. If you're hard up just now it might be worth your while. Jack will pay, of course."

Robin's voice changed its tone slightly.

"If you're not lying to me, lady," he said, "I'll allow you into my studio for a moment. Judy will look after me and keep the proprieties."

Vera, Lady Munstead laughed in a musical way.

"How absurd you are, Robin! You haven't changed at all. You always used to make me laugh. Poor old Jack has no sense of humour."

They both came into the studio where Judy was standing listening to this dialogue.

"How do you do?" said Lady Munstead, holding out a gloved hand. "I'm so glad to see you again. Do you remember how rude you were to me the last time I called? Well, I won't say rude, but cold and haughty. I thought you were living in sin with dear Robin."

"You were mistaken," said Judy quietly.

Lady Munstead, who looked like Romney's portrait of Lady Hamilton—the one with the muff—sat down on the dilapidated sofa and looked round the studio with a smile of amusement.

"*La vie de Bohème !*" she said. "How enchanting when one's young ! How squalid and romantic !"

"Come to business, Vera," suggested Robin.

Lady Munstead came to business after further conversation of a light nature.

"The fact is, Robin darling," she told him, "I'm a reformed woman. No longer do I have breakfast in bed and read French novels before lunch."

"Good hearing !" said Robin. "Nice for your husband."

"Oh, he's proud of me," she answered. "I'm desperately busy with all this A.R.P. stuff. Up to the neck in it, my dear ! I'm chairwoman of the women's committee for air raid protection in Sussex. I am chiefly responsible for the reception of evacuated school-children from London in our area. I've attended all the lectures on First Aid and have goaded Jack into building a bomb-proof shelter capable of holding all the people on our own estate. The Bishop feeds out of my hand. Major-generals click heels to me. All the ladies of the county tremble in my presence."

"Congratulations, Vera," said Robin. "But I don't see where I come in."

She kept him on tenterhooks for some time and then revealed her idea.

"It came to me a night or two ago," she said. "I want my portrait painted in my uniform complete with gas mask. I thought how frightfully historical it would be in five hundred years or so. Portrait of Vera, Lady Munstead, previous to Armageddon, 1939. Note in the catalogue : This is an interesting historical portrait of the Countess of Munstead in the reign of George VI. The gallant and unfortunate lady was killed by a German air bomb while endeavouring to rescue her servants from the blazing ruins of her mediaeval mansion. Very rare !"

Robin's sense of humour was amused by this fantasy and he lost his sulky look.

"Are you pulling my leg, Vera ?"

"I'm quite serious," she told him. "I put the idea to

Jack and he was rather taken by it. He's prepared to pay for it. How much do you charge for a portrait nowadays, Robin darling?"

"I don't charge," he said. "I just hold out a hat and look the other way."

"How about a hundred and fifty?" asked Vera. "Jack says he can't afford more than that, though I call it mean."

Robin exchanged glances with Judy. This was, of course, a miracle. Here, by the kindness of Lady Munstead, was an instalment of hope in the very hour of darkness.

"*Heil Hitler!*" said Robin. "That fellow little knows all the good deeds he does—providing work for bored ladies and starving artists."

He didn't think much of the price, he said, but for old times' sake and present international troubles he was prepared to accept it.

"But I insist on having a chaperone," he told her.

XIV

JUDY had gone back that evening to the house in St. Leonard's Terrace with excited eyes because of a plan she had in her head. It was the plan she had mentioned to Robin before the arrival of the lady, who reminded her so much of one of Romney's portraits of Lady Hamilton. She spoke to her mother about it first and then to John.

"Mother," said Judy, "what are we going to do about this house when John goes back to New York?"

Mrs. Barton was studying a book of prophecies by a well-known astrologist, which she had bought at a book-stall for twopence.

She looked up amiably at her daughter, who had just come into their little drawing-room on the first floor.

"What do you expect me to do about it?" she asked. "Move it somewhere else?"

"No," said Judy, sitting on a low stool not far from her mother's chair. "But I mean when John's gone and I marry Robin, you can't stay on here alone."

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Barton, in her matter-of-fact New England way. "You won't be far off in Knightsbridge. I can pop in and see you whenever I like and with due regard to not poking my nose in where I'm not wanted."

"But, mother," said Judy, "supposing you're taken sick. Who will look after you? I couldn't bear the idea of your being here all alone."

"I shan't be taken sick," answered Mrs. Barton. "I'm going to keep going for quite a time yet."

"In any case," said Judy, pursuing the subject relentlessly, though her mother seemed more interested in her book, "this house is too big for one little woman like

you, mother. It seems to me quite absurd. Upstairs and downstairs and in my lady's chamber! Dining-room, drawing-room, five bedrooms and two bathrooms. I mean to say you can't possibly sleep in five bedrooms at the same time, and one bathroom is enough for any respectable lady."

Mrs. Barton pushed her book on one side, took off her glasses and looked at Judy with a whimsical smile.

"What's the matter with the child?" she asked, as though some third person were present. "What's she driving at? Does she want her old mother to live in a caravan or a wigwam?"

Judy blushed slightly because of inward emotion.

"Mother," she said, "I've a wonderful idea. Only I don't know what John will say about it."

Mrs. Barton answered drily:

"Well, I don't know what I'll say about it myself. I don't know what it is."

"It's just this," said Judy. "When John goes back to New York, Robin and I could come and look after you here and keep the house warm until John comes back, if he ever does, poor dear. If war happens we can all die together."

"Certainly a wonderful idea!" said Mrs. Barton. "Now that's what I call a charming idea! We can all go down to the kitchen and turn on the gramophone and say a few little prayers before bombs begin to drop and blow us into Kingdom Come!"

She chuckled at this brilliant idea of Judy's.

"Judy!" she cried. "You make me laugh!"

Judy laughed too. She had just blurted out a secret thought and now knew how absurd she had been.

"Well, mother," she cried, "you know what I mean!"

Mrs. Barton had a quick and shrewd mind in all things except her simple credulity in astrologers, professional mediums and the infallibility of table-turning.

"I know exactly what you mean, child," she said. "That

Robin of yours is having a lean time, poor man. He can't sell his pictures. It's quite likely that he can't pay his rent. You want to offer him board and lodging with a good-natured mother-in-law whom he would beguile with his laughing eyes. Isn't that the idea?"

"He'll make a nice son-in-law," said Judy. "He's very good at table-turning, mother, and he can cook omelettes like an angel."

"How do you know that?" asked Judy's mother suspiciously.

"I had supper in his studio one night," confessed Judy. "I did some apple fritters and he did the omelette."

"It's time you got married," said Mrs. Barton. "I don't know what they'd say in Massachusetts if they heard that Judy Barton spent late hours in a London studio having picnic meals with a good-looking painter."

Judy was of the opinion that even in Massachusetts such a thing might happen, but she didn't argue the point. On the contrary, she agreed that it was time she got married.

"I don't mind giving house room to Robin while John's away in the United States," said Mrs. Barton. "To be quite honest, my dear, I shall love to have you both. I've fallen for my future son-in-law and I'm quite sure he has very pronounced psychical powers. But you mustn't forget that when John comes back he may bring a wife with him, and we can't all live like a feudal tribe in the same house, much as I should like it. But I know all about young wives and husbands. They want a lot of *Lebensraum*."

That was a new word to Judy. It was a word which Mrs. Barton had obtained from newspaper reading. The Germans, she explained, wanted more *Lebensraum*, according to the Berlin correspondent of the London *Times*.

"Well then, it's all fixed," said Judy, much relieved. "Robin and I will have the top-floor rooms with bathroom attached. It will be our little paradise until we can get

a home of our own. Oh, mother, I want to laugh and I want to cry!"

She did both, after flinging her arms round her mother's neck.

She was somewhat embarrassed at being caught in this emotional moment by her brother, who came into the drawing-room with that tall young Frenchman named Paul de Brissac, whom she had met in Paris with her sister Lucy. He was a cousin, she knew, of Lucy's husband, Louis de Maresquel.

John raised his eyebrows, seeing Judy's wet and shining eyes.

"Anything happened?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Barton. "Judy and I were enjoying a little private joke."

"How charming to see you again," said Paul de Brissac in his elegant way. "Lucy insisted that I should present myself. She sends a thousand messages, of course."

XV

PAUL DE BRISSAC stayed rather late, and when he had gone Judy slipped up to her bedroom, leaving her mother alone with John.

Judy's plan did not seem to appeal to him much. For several moments he was silent, thinking it over with a frown on his forehead.

"What's against it, John?" asked Mrs. Barton.

"There's a lot against it," he said. "In the first place, I'm getting worried again about the international situation."

Mrs. Barton smiled good-humouredly.

"My dear boy," she answered, "don't you think you ought to stop worrying about that? I mean one can't go on worrying oneself into fiddlestrings every time Mr. Hitler goes for a week-end to his country estate. And what's that got to do with Robin and Judy?"

"Everything," said John. "And it's a lot to do with you and me, and all our future plans. I think we ought to give up this house. I've been thinking it over. It's the best thing to do."

Mrs. Barton disagreed, and remembered something she had read in her school books as a girl.

"I can't quite recall who was the famous man who said, '*J'y suis, j'y reste*', but that's how I feel about it. I'm getting too old to be shunted about like a sack of potatoes. I'm very happy here, John."

"Mother," said John gravely, "you don't understand. There's some very big news tonight. Mr. Chamberlain has guaranteed the frontiers of Poland and most other small nations. He has thrown down a challenge to Hitler. It's the beginning of a new policy for England. If Hitler

refuses to be checked in his plans of violence there's going to be a show-down this time, as sure as fate. Then what's going to happen to this little house and its unfortunate inmates?"

"Oh, I dare say the Germans won't take much notice of us," said Mrs. Barton calmly. "They won't budge me, John."

John refused to accept this decision.

"It's a good opportunity for getting on the right side of safety," he told her. "I shouldn't have any peace of mind if I went back to New York and left you here in the middle of another crisis. Why don't you and Judy come back with me and wait on the other side, at least until things look more settled? That fellow Robin could come out too and get some work in New York; they'd like his stuff. He might make some useful dollars. Besides——"

He hesitated for a moment and then laughed in a curious, excited way.

Mrs. Barton looked at him searchingly.

"What's coming now?" she asked. "What's the knock-out blow, my dear?"

"Mother," said John, "I'm half afraid to tell you, I'm half afraid to tell anybody, because I may be kidding myself. But Anne and I are engaged. Can you believe it?"

Mrs. Barton seemed to be wondering if she could believe it.

"Well, that's good news, John," she said, after a moment's pause. "That certainly is surprising!"

"It's unbelievable," said John. "It's wholly incredible. It's one of the romances of world history. John Barton, American reporter, is engaged to Lady Anne Ede, daughter of the Earl of Stanfield. What'll they think about that in Middleboro, Massachusetts, and the *Observer* office in New York?"

Mrs. Barton had a good answer.

"They'll think that Anne Ede is a very lucky young woman."

"It's just too wonderful," said John in a quiet ecstasy. "I'm not worthy of it. I can't live up to it. God has put His hand on my shoulder, and I'm afraid He may take it off again."

"Ain't you talking nonsense, sonny?" asked Mrs. Barton drily.

"I'm talking about miracles," said John. "The language of miracles isn't like that of common prose. I want to break into poetry. I want to recite Elizabethan sonnets. I want to walk on air, and sing hymns of praise in St. Leonard's Terrace. In other words, mother, I'm considerably elated."

Mrs. Barton smiled at her excited son. She had not seen him like this very often. She remembered the last time she saw him like that was when his father had given him a brand new Tin Lizzie on his sixteenth birthday.

"Anne's a pretty creature," she observed, "though I don't know her very well. I dare say a poet in the Elizabethan period might have gone wild about her and written nice things about her nose and her eyebrows."

"Her beauty is beyond words," said John humbly. "And she has the spirit of Shakespeare's women."

"Some of 'em were sluts," said Mrs. Barton in her matter-of-fact way. "But I hope you'll be happy with her, my dear, one of these days. Don't let her break your heart or anything like that."

"Well," said John cheerfully, "my heart's getting used to it. She's broken it five times, but now she's mended it for ever and a day. I feel worshipful. I feel mediaeval. I'm going to write my next dispatch for the *Observer* in free verse."

Mrs. Barton did not check this exuberance. She was glad her John was so happy, but privately she was not enthusiastic about Anne Ede, whom she had seen only a few times. John had brought her in one day. He had also given a little dinner-party in a Soho restaurant where Anne and her brother David had appeared. Anne certainly had

behaved very nicely to her, but somehow she couldn't imagine her as John's wife.

After further extravagant words from an exalted lover, Mrs. Barton brought him back to more material affairs.

"I can't see what difference this engagement of yours makes to Judy's plan of keeping the house warm with Robin while you're back in New York."

"Why, mother," he answered, "don't you understand? If Anne falls in love with the United States—and they're going to fall in love with her—we may get married out there and settle down in Washington, or maybe on top of a New York skyscraper. She's coming out with her brother David. I hope to keep her there."

"You're crazy, John!" said Mrs. Barton, with complete incredulity. "Anne Ede belongs here. You'll never keep her away from England. And anyhow, you're coming back before the fall."

"Who's been telling you?" asked John.

Mrs. Barton answered mysteriously, "Never mind. It's written."

John paid no attention to this utterance which belonged to his mother's private association with the spooks.

It was three days later when an announcement of some importance appeared in the *London Times* and other English papers :

The engagement has been announced of Lady Anne Ede, daughter of the Earl and Countess of Stanfield, to Mr. John Barton, London correspondent of the *New York Observer*, formerly of Middleboro, Massachusetts.

Some of the more gossipy papers contained photographs of Lady Anne Ede—"One of England's most beautiful daughters," said the *Daily Sketch*. One paper only published a photograph of John Barton, well-known American correspondent. It made him look, he thought, like a Mormon, or one of the less intellectual inmates of Sing-Sing.

Still, it was all very marvellous, and as he walked down St. Leonard's Terrace on the way to Sloane Square station and his London office where Mr. Franklin Speed shook hands with him and spoke kind and generous words, he wanted to recite Elizabethan sonnets, but was unable to do so, not having memorized them in his early youth. He stepped into a florist's shop in Sloane Street and dispatched a bouquet of spring flowers to a house in Belgrave Place.

XVI

THE private adventures of men and women went on in the usual way of small interests and love-making and financial anxieties and family affairs, despite the constant and increasing menace of a world war which threatened to interrupt the normal way of life and change all its plans and purposes. That has always been the astounding and heroic quality of humanity—this getting on with daily toil, this refusal to abandon love and mating and hopeful endeavour even when danger and death were round the corner.

The Romans still gossiped in the baths of Caracalla when the Goths and Vandals were gathering in the dark forests. Roman intellectuals discussed the folly of their politicians or a new poet and his work when Attila was at the gates. Boccaccio told his merry tales when the plague was ravaging the towns of Italy and the death-carts were busy in narrow streets. French peasant boys played their pipes in the ripening corn when Napoleon was fighting at Waterloo, or when another of that name was surrounded at Sedan. In July, 1914, when there were heavy rumblings beneath the crust of European peace and great armies were being mobilized by kings and emperors, cricket was played as usual on the village greens of England and young men and women floated idly down the Thames in their punts, and there was the pit-pat of tennis-balls on many lawns.

So it was in England during those days when John Barton was 'saying it with flowers' to Anne Ede, and when Judy was slipping round to a studio in Knightsbridge with love in her eyes, and when many other Johns and Judys

were busy with their own private adventure. But as one whose job it was to study the tone and temper of English life at this time, even though he was under orders to return for a while to his own country, John was aware that beneath the outward appearance of 'business as usual', and amusement as usual, and the normal routine of daily life, there was a change of mood and a change of rhythm.

He had watched England during the September crisis of the previous year. He had seen and shared the dark forebodings of those days and the sense of doom and disaster and infinite tragedy which crept into everybody's mind when the first trenches were dug in London parks and squares. Now, after Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia and the change of English policy of appeasement to defensive alliances against possible aggression, there was, he thought, a stiffening and hardening of public opinion. He gained this impression from casual conversation in streets and shops. The man who sold papers to him in Sloane Square was probably expressing more than his own opinion when he uttered a few remarks on this subject.

"That there Hitler has gone beyond the limit this time," he said. "If he thinks he can go on frightening us he's mistook. If he asks for any more trouble he's going to get it—in the neck. I'm against war—I saw too much of it last time—but I'm against those who want to trample over other people's lands and other people's liberties. We've had too much of this crisis stuff. I'm getting fed up with it, and it's the same with others."

A policeman on his beat in St. Leonard's Terrace stopped for a few minutes' chat when John went out to post a letter late one night. It was a letter to Anne Ede.

"What do you make of things?" he asked, knowing that John was a newspaper man.

He gave his own answer.

"Mr. Chamberlain won't stand any more nonsense from our little Adolf. There's a limit to the patience even of

nice peace-loving gentlemen like our Prime Minister. Perhaps he's gone a bit far in pledging himself to defend Poland—I'm not quite sure where it is on the map—but you've got to draw the line somewhere with a fellow who wants to overstep the mark. Well, we seem to have drawn the line now, and if the Germans cross it they'll come up against something very unpleasant. Though, mind you, I've nothing against the Germans as Germans. I saw something of them on the Rhine twenty years ago and I liked them. A nice people, if properly led."

He eased his chin-strap a little and looked up at the sky.

"I expect we're getting stronger in the air," he said. "Every day counts, no doubt. Still, we want a lot more man-power. In my opinion we shall have to go in for conscription."

"Isn't that against English tradition, old man?" asked John.

"English tradition my foot!" answered the policeman—a young fellow of the new type. "The country's asking for it."

He readjusted his helmet and smiled above his chin-strap.

"American, aren't you?" he asked civilly.

"You've guessed it," said John.

"Ah," said Constable X 324. "You're the lucky people. Far away from the firing line. Still, I'm hoping you'll come in quicker than last time if there's any trouble."

"We certainly shall," said John, taking a chance on the future.

"Glad to hear it! Well, good night. The best of luck."

Out of many conversations like this John Barton sampled the new mood of England and found it uncompromising, especially among the working classes and the small folk. He heard one phrase repeated many times in different forms.

"We're getting fed up with Hitler and the usual week-end crisis. Too much of it! If he wants a war he'll get it."

"I wish I could pass on some of this *vox populi* to the right quarters in Germany," said John Barton one night to a friend of his who was Peter Langdon. "I have an idea that when the English people get 'fed up' with another folk it's time the other folk took notice of trouble ahead. Our friend Dr. Goebbels has overplayed his hand about that Battle of Nerves. England refuses to be rattled any more."

He was speaking the wrong words to Peter Langdon.

"That's all very well for people who don't know what's going on," he said, "but I confess I'm deeply alarmed. Chamberlain has swung away from his policy of appeasement. These new commitments, Barton, seem to me frightfully dangerous."

"He's called 'Check' to the black king," said John, who played chess with this friend now and then.

"Have we the strength to adopt such a policy?" asked Langdon. "How can we defend the Poles if they're attacked?"

"By threatening Hitler with war if he attacks Poland," said John. "He won't risk it. Germany's in no shape for war if it lasts more than a few weeks or a few months."

Langdon did not look reassured.

"How do we know?" he asked. "Isn't that a wish-dream? Besides, haven't we handed the arbitrament of peace or war to the Poles? Ought we to have gone as far as that? They may be like the French in 1870 when they shouted '*À Berlin!*' and crumpled up at Sedan. I'm not a military man, or strategist, but I've been looking at the map of Poland. Their frontier is terribly open to attack."

"There's Russia," said John reassuringly. "Chamberlain is beginning to talk with Russia. There's a mission going to Moscow."

Langdon raised both hands with a gesture of despair.

"Russia? That blood-soaked nightmare! How long is it since Stalin executed most of his generals? How long since he starved millions of peasants to death in the Ukraine

because they wouldn't enter his collective farms? What are we doing with Russia which only three weeks ago denounced the plutocracies and reaffirmed their will to destroy the capitalistic countries? I read a speech by Stalin. That was his faith and purpose. Now Winston Churchill, who poured millions of English gold into the campaign against the Reds, talks solemn and sonorous words about a Russian alliance."

"Needs must when the devil drives," said John light-heartedly. "The devil is driving—against the democracies and the British Empire."

"I wish Chamberlain hadn't gone so far," said Langdon. "It's a gambler's risk. We can't afford to gamble."

John argued with him. He found himself arguing interminably with this good friend of his.

"What's the alternative? The risks are great anyhow. The greatest risk of all, my dear Langdon, is to let the Germans advance deeper into South-east Europe until they're strong enough to turn round and smash England and France—surely?"

Langdon shook his head.

"Chamberlain calls it a Peace Front. Germany calls it a policy of encirclement. That word 'encirclement' is making a present to Dr. Goebbels and his propaganda machine. It's the old bogey in the German mind. Nothing will ever make them believe they weren't encircled before the last war."

"They're a nation which has to be encircled," said John. "Otherwise they'll overflow their banks and swamp the world."

Peter Langdon still hankered after a peace of conciliation. He still believed in the will to peace of the German people. He still believed with all the passion of his soul that any kind of peace was better than any kind of war which would destroy the fine flower of the world's youth, among whom, in his secret heart, was Paul, his son, now doing brilliantly at Cambridge.

XVII

CURIOUSLY enough, John found Langdon's son in his own study when he returned home next door. The boy was deep in a leather chair reading an American novel which he had taken from one of the shelves. He sprang up smiling when John opened the door, but there was something in the look of his eyes which suggested that he was inwardly excited.

"Hullo, Paul!" said John, somewhat astonished. "I thought you were studying the classics in an ancient university."

"I'm only down for the night," he answered. "I had leave from my tutor. As a matter of fact I wanted to consult you about something of importance to my young life and future career."

He laughed with a sign of shyness.

"Sit down again, my dear lad," said John. "I feel rather flattered at the idea that I've enough wisdom to advise anybody, still less a Cambridge undergraduate. What about your noble father? Isn't he the very fount of parental wisdom?"

Young Paul hesitated and then made open confession.

"That's just the point. My noble father will undoubtedly disapprove of my present idea. You know what he stands for in every line he has written, and in every fibre of his mind. He's an intellectual pacifist. He believes in converting humanity, not excluding Adolf the Great, to intelligent co-operation and general goodwill. In fact he's definitely against such nasty things as bombing aeroplanes."

John agreed with this analysis of Peter Langdon. Had he not just been receiving further evidence thereof? But

he was rather disconcerted by this visit from young Paul. He would certainly refuse to intervene in any difference of opinion between father and son.

"That doesn't rule him out as a man of sympathy and understanding," he said. "What's your trouble, laddie?"

"No trouble, really," said Paul. "Only lack of moral courage on my part and a slight indecision regarding the strength of my own convictions."

"Let's hear," said John good-naturedly. "Don't forget I'm an alien according to my passport. I mean I mayn't get the fine shades of an English point of honour."

Paul Langdon received this remark with a light-hearted laugh.

"I doubt whether there's much difference between the undergraduate mind in Harvard or Cambridge, England," he said. "Aren't we all getting face to face—most unpleasantly—with the primitive and essential facts of this Brave New World—with immediate reference to present perils and other stark realities?"

He spoke in the undergraduate style, masking shyness under verbal camouflage.

"And then what?" asked John. "Is there anything you want me to do about it all? I refer to those stark realities."

Paul Langdon, son of Peter, was inclined to believe that somebody ought to get busy about it, not excluding himself. He had been getting rather bothered, intellectually and spiritually, about Germany's threat to the democracies and the possible challenge to all liberties. He had been talking on the subject, late into the night sometimes, with friends of his at Cambridge. One of them, it appeared, was a kind of Rupert Brooke—that is to say a great idealist—for whom Paul had a considerable admiration and respect.

"He makes me painfully aware of my own moral slackness," said Paul. "He has rather convinced me that one ought to have the courage to die for one's ideals, if need be, or even for what one imagines to be one's ideals. It sounds rather absurd, of course. It sounds very 'Oxford

Groupy' I know. But that's how I'm beginning to feel about it."

John answered cautiously, not quite sure of the right answer.

"I don't get you altogether," he said. "I hope nobody's going to ask you to die for anything yet. You've only just begun to live, laddie. Give life a chance."

Paul looked faintly discouraged by these words.

"Oh, I haven't the slightest desire to die just yet!" he answered. "On the contrary I'm very pleased with life in its pleasanter moments. But life without a purpose is pretty futile, isn't it? Purpose at the moment seems to me fairly clear and defined for fellows like me. I mean if we're worth our salt at all we ought to give a lead to the duty of defending this little island of ours and its crusted traditions, which include such items as liberty and certain loyalties."

"Well, I'm with you so far," said John, feeling his way.

Young Paul smiled and apologized for boring him on the subject.

"All this is very long-winded," he said. "The truth is that I'm thinking of chucking Cambridge and joining the Air Force as a pilot. If I don't do it now I shall be too old. But what is my father going to say about it?"

"And your mother, old man," said John.

The boy nodded.

"I know. She won't like it. But she's really more spiritual than my father, who thinks too much of life. Mother sees the essential values more clearly."

John was thoughtful and silent for a few seconds. He felt perturbed by this boy's decision to abandon his studies without parental consent.

"If they brought in conscription, you wouldn't have this internal struggle," he said. "It would be settled for you. You would have to go according to your age, and not before."

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"Chamberlain's afraid of the Left opposition," he said.

"They would make an awful yelp if he brought in any measure for compulsory service. But it's the only logical outcome of his policy. What's the good of committing ourselves to Poland if we haven't the man-power to put into the field? But I'm asking your advice, John, and you're shirking it."

John denied any desire to shirk it, but he hedged a little.

"What's the exact point you want to put to me?" he asked. "I want to get it clear."

"Oh, it's perfectly simple," said Paul. "Do you think I can put it up to my father? I mean do you think I'm morally justified for the sake of my own conscience in hurting him pretty severely, I imagine? You know what he is, and you know what I am to him. He'll be frightfully apprehensive if I take up flying, and he'll think the worst has happened if I have to learn the gentle art of dropping bombs over enemy cities in retaliation for attacks on our own congested districts."

John was silent again for what seemed quite a time. It was a tragic poser, he thought. It was the infernal tragedy of things—he put it all down to Adolf Hitler—that a lad like this, so fine and scholarly, the product of civilization at its highest, born and bred in idealism by parents who loved beauty and all good things, should feel himself called to abandon his studies, put out the lamp, and take up a job as a fighting airman. To defend civilization it was necessary to become uncivilized! An infernal paradox. To defend English women and children from murderous attack it might be necessary for lads like this to drop high explosives on German women and children. Jesus Christ! Was that the end of His message to mankind?

John Barton was deeply distressed in his own mind and conscience. He could give no counsel or advice with any certainty in his own soul. Only a few nights ago he had urged his mother to get away from this danger zone and to join him in the United States, where grew 'this flower,

safety', far from the firing line. It was not for him to urge this boy to join those air squadrons which in a month or two might be fighting the war in the air.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you must put that up to your mother and father. I can't take any responsibility by advising you on that subject. It's worse than having to give the judgment of Solomon."

He was glad when young Paul went round to his own house, and his heart bled for Peter Langdon, novelist, hater of war, lover of youth, to whom this son was all in all.

XVIII

THE English adventure was nearing its end for John Barton, it seemed. He was under orders to sail by the end of April, though he was prepared to risk everything to postpone this time limit—even the flaming wrath of the proprietor and chief of the *New York Observer*, if, by so doing, he could persuade Anne to marry him before sailing.

He could not persuade her.

“My dear John,” she said, “we English girls can’t be rushed like that! We don’t marry according to Reno rules. We like to be ‘shouted’ in church, as they say in our village.”

That meant nothing to John Barton, but she explained the ecclesiastical rule of having the banns called three weeks in succession, so that any knowledgeable person might forbid them by discovering some frightful bar of consanguinity, affinity or spiritual relationship.

“You can’t ask me to believe that!” said John with deep incredulity.

She asked him to believe it though she admitted that Bohemians, intellectuals and divorced persons might take out a licence—just like a dog licence—for marriage in a registry office. Even then it took quite a time. Three weeks was hardly enough.

“Well,” said John, “you’re slow-moving people. Why, in New York a girl can get divorced in the morning and married in the afternoon. It’s easy!”

“We don’t do that kind of thing in England,” said Anne, using a phrase which he regretted because, if said at a dinner-table in New York, it might cause some slight annoyance.

She was aware of his secret thought, and told him so.

"Oh, you needn't be frightened. I shan't talk like that in America. I was just doing a little leg-pull, dear John. Well do I know that some of the things we do in England are not divinely ordered."

"Say, Anne," said John, "you know I'm the happiest man on earth since a certain sensational engagement was announced and not repudiated by the lady. But I can't see your objection to immediate marriage. We could have a good time on the boat and I should step off it feeling as though I owned New York and all its skyscrapers. Think what a thrill it would give to the reporters who board the ship in search of social news. 'Boys,' I should say, 'I should like to present my wife, Lady Anne Barton.' They'd think I'd been made an English peer!"

Anne was very sweet about it, but explained to him that such things could not be just yet. She would have to look after her brother David for a while. He would feel very strange and lost in Washington. And then—well . . .

"Well what?" asked John anxiously.

She smiled at him as he sat with her in her old-fashioned drawing-room in Belgrave Place, with its mid-Victorian paintings, its chintz-covered chairs, its faint scent of polished mahogany.

"Darling," she said, "don't be in too much of a hurry to tie the knot. Will you think me hateful if I confess that I get into a little blue funk when I think of being married?"

"I don't think you're hateful," he told her, "because I think you're adorable, but I feel dejected. Aren't you sure of me, Anne?"

She let him hold her hand for more than a moment.

"Yes, I'm sure of you, John. I mean I'm sure of your love and loyalty and all that. You're a true man. Yes, sir!—as they say in the States, according to the movies and my own ears. But that's why I have a little blue funk.

I mean how terrible for you if I turn out badly. How terrible for me if I know that I'm not the right kind of wife for you."

"You're just kidding," said John. "You didn't mean that."

"I mean it," said Anne. "I'm so English and you're so American. I may make some awful *gaffe* in the United States. I might say the wrong things and wreck your promising career."

"Lady," said John, "when once you've passed the Statue of Liberty you can say what you like. We don't put secret police behind the dinner-tables. We believe in free speech."

"Anyhow," said Anne, "I can't get married in the twinkling of an eye. Give me time, my dear."

Reluctantly, John withdrew his pressure for the moment. He was not quite sure yet how he stood with Anne's family.

Anne's announcement of her engagement to her family had caused some discussion among them and a little badinage at the breakfast-table on the morning following the dinner-party at their house in Belgrave Place.

It was David, the diplomat, who mentioned the fact to his mother when he came down in his dressing-gown and found her busy, as usual, behind the coffee-cups and a copy of *The Times* propped up against the coffee-pot.

"Any world-shaking news, mother?" asked David, after he had kissed her cheek lightly and with filial affection.

Lady Stanfield put down *The Times* and buttered a piece of toast.

"Pass the marmalade, my dear," she said. "Everybody's very late as usual. Your father has a nasty chill, I'm afraid."

David lifted the cover of a silver dish and scrutinized some sausages.

"Well, I admit that's rather earth-shaking when he blows his nose, but I referred to the international situation."

"President Roosevelt," said Lady Stanfield, "has sent a note to Hitler saying that he's scaring the smaller nations

out of their wits. He wants to know whether that man is prepared to guarantee their security. He mentions most of the nations on earth. I confess I haven't heard of some of them, but then I was always rather weak in geography."

"Rather important," said David. "It looks as though the Americans were departing rapidly from their policy of isolation. It will make things easier when I get to Washington."

His mother was sceptical, it seemed.

"Oh, I don't think we can count on 'em. And after all, I don't blame them for wanting to keep out of the European madhouse. They're lucky in being so far away from it all." She glanced towards the door through which came a boyish-looking figure. "Good morning, Marjorie. Not having your breakfast in bed today? What energy! What self-discipline! But don't you think it's rather disgusting to come down in your pyjamas?"

"No, mother," said Lady Marjorie Ede, pecking at her mother's cheek. "They're perfectly decent. Good morning, David. Feeling bobbish?"

David looked thoughtful, as though he were trying to remember something which had happened on the previous evening.

"Oh, by the way," he said presently, "talking about American isolation, that reminds me. Anne seems to be engaged to that American reporter, John Barton."

Lady Stanfield looked up for a moment from a pile of letters which lay at the side of her coffee-cup.

"Oh, really! It's the first I've heard of it. I suppose she'll tell me in due course."

Lady Marjorie laughed lightly as she helped herself to sausages and bacon.

"Poor old Anne! A lucky escape for her perhaps. She might have been married to a German and thrust into a concentration camp for abusing Hitler in her sleep. Though I must say that Helmut is a very nice German. If he asked me to marry him, I'd risk it."

Her mother laughed over one of her letters.

"You ought to be spanked, Marjorie! I thought you were in love with a pale-faced Communist from Cambridge?"

"I was," said Marjorie; "but he goes to Woolworth's for his hair-oil."

"Well, why not?" asked the Countess of Stanfield. "I go to Woolworth's for all sorts of things."

David came back to the question of Anne's engagement.

"I suppose the family will approve?" he asked. "I mean, do you think Anne ought to marry a New York journalist? After all, we still stand for something, don't we?"

"Good heavens!" cried Marjorie, thrusting her fork into a sausage and holding it aloft. "David is talking like an early-Victorian snob. He's talking in terms of our ancient feudalism. Aren't we all stony broke? And haven't we departed from all that caste stuff? 'I suppose the family will approve?' I can hear our great-grandfather saying that to our great-grandmother 'way back in the early Georgian era!"

"Shut up, Snooks," said David. "I'm talking to mother. We've all made up our minds that you will probably run off with a groom or the fellow who mends your car. I've written you off, but Anne is rather different."

"Don't you believe it!" said Marjorie. "All women are sluts. Anne's a woman. Q.E.D."

"Marjorie," said Lady Stanfield severely, "if you go talking like that I shall send you up to your bedroom. I'm very tolerant, but I have to draw the line somewhere."

"Sorry, mother!" said Marjorie meekly. "I didn't include you, of course."

Beyond the door was the sound of elephantine trumpetings. Lord Stanfield had a slight cold and was blowing his nose.

"Good gracious!" cried Lady Stanfield. "Must you shake the whole house, my dear?"

"Sorry," said his lordship. "A most infernal cold, my love. What a climate! And draughts everywhere! Where's Anne?"

"Not down yet, father," said Marjorie. "She's wrapped, no doubt, in amorous dreams. I suppose you know she's got engaged to John Barton, that lanky American reporter who swoops around the world writing hair-raising scares about the international situation and prophesying doom for every week-end? Not that I've anything against him. If he wanted me he could have me. I wouldn't mind a free trip to New York."

"God bless my soul!" said his lordship. "Anne engaged? Why, it only seems yesterday that I was playing bears under the table! And that reminds me that when I happened to be doing so one day, the Prime Minister was shown into the room and I had to crawl out from under the table-cloth with my hair all ruffled. The P.M. looked flabbergasted."

"Don't tell anecdotes at breakfast, my dear," said the lady of the house.

"Sorry," said his lordship. "Any bacon left?"

"Tons," said Marjorie. "But the point is, father, do you approve of Anne's engagement to an American who writes for the Yellow Press? I mean to say, father, isn't it rather a *mésalliance* for the noble family of Ede? Do we consent to this family degradation and this impertinent intrusion into our ancient caste and noble state? Do we bump him off, Bo, according to the customs of his own country?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Lord Stanfield good-humouredly. "What's all that nonsense?"

"David raised the point, my lord," said Marjorie, who seemed to be enjoying herself. "He wanted to know if the family approved of this American marriage for our Lady Anne."

Lord Stanfield gulped down some coffee from a large-sized cup which was his particular privilege at breakfast.

"Approve?" he asked incredulously. "Are modern fathers and mothers asked for their approval when their daughters get engaged? It's damn' lucky for 'em if their daughters don't go off with disreputable fellows without a marriage licence."

"My dear," said Lady Stanfield, "don't be vulgar, especially at breakfast."

"I'm being honest, my love," said his lordship. "At least I'm thinking of stories I hear in the club about the manners and morals of our modern misses. I don't know a thing about it myself. It may be exaggerated."

"It isn't, father," said Marjorie firmly. "We're simply awful—when we're not really nice."

"As for the old social stuff," said Lord Stanfield, "in my opinion it's gone. There's no distinction of classes nowadays, and on the whole I think it's a good thing. We're the last remnants of an outworn caste, and we can't keep up the pretence much longer. I mean, we can't afford it, don't you know? This rearmament, even if it doesn't lead to war, will hurry up the inevitable socializing of England. Higher income tax, increased death duties, a capital levy. I can see myself ending up life in a London basement looking through the bars at the feet of the passers-by."

"Father!" said David, with a faint laugh. "For God's sake——"

"What an awful thought!" cried Lady Stanfield, looking across the table at her husband with a kind of horrified amusement.

"Oh, I'm quite serious," he said. "And if we don't escape this war—which looks as if it's coming; I'm sorry Chamberlain has committed us to those brigands in South-east Europe, we shall all be starving on equal terms before three months have passed. A peer won't get better rations than a peasant. We shall be in the cart together."

"They may hang a few of us at Tyburn," said Marjorie cheerfully. "Some of my Communist friends say there'll

have to be a liquidation of the old crowd. I shall have to bare my little white neck as the daughter of an earl and as a member of the Fifth Column. I hope to go bravely to the scaffold with a look of disdain upon the jeering mob. 'Canaille! Cads! Curse you!' Or, on the other hand, 'May God forgive you!'"

"Snooks," said David, "you're incurable! You ought to be put into a home."

"I have been put into a home," said Marjorie. "I want to escape from it. I want fresh air, the open spaces, the far horizon. I think I'll marry a Canadian. Do you know one, father?"

"I don't know what all this conversation is about," said Lord Stanfield grumpily. "It's very irritating at the breakfast-table."

"It's about Anne's engagement to an American reporter," said Lady Stanfield. "What do you think about it without prophesying doom?"

"I can't see anything wrong with it," said Lord Stanfield. "He seems a very decent fellow. I suppose I shall have to make Anne some kind of allowance, though where it's coming from I haven't the least idea, unless we can sell Aldermere to some armament manufacturers or turn it into a girls' school."

"Why not an asylum, father?" asked Marjorie, with her innocent look. "Hasn't the world gone mad?"

"Yes," said her father. "But don't drive me mad, my dear, I'm trying to keep sane. Where's *The Times*?"

He glanced towards the door as another member of the family came in.

"Oh, good morning, Anne. We've all been talking about you. I hear you've got engaged."

Anne was in a morning frock of powdered blue and looked very fresh and charming.

"Yes, Daddy," she said, kissing his cheek. "You may be a grandfather one day after all!"

The Earl of Stanfield spluttered over his coffee.

"God bless my soul!" he said. "What a frightful thought!"

"Anne," said Marjorie, looking at her sister with a hidden laugh, "I believe you have a sense of humour now and then."

From which conversation it may be inferred that the Edes had no great objection to receiving John Barton, American reporter, into the bosom of their family. This fact was reported to him by Anne herself, to his satisfaction and relief.

"They all like you, John," she told him. "They all think you're a very nice American."

"That's fine," said John. "And I'll be glad when I get married to you. Say, Anne . . ."

He reopened the argument about marriage before sailing, but had to resign himself to the thought that English girls couldn't be rushed off their feet to the hymeneal altar.

XIX

JUDY had been the most astonished person to hear of John's engagement to Anne. Somehow she had never believed that he had a chance in that direction, but the news seemed to her in the nature of a happy miracle and she flung her arms about this tall brother and expressed her joy.

"Oh, John, it's terribly good! What with me and Robin and you and Anne it seems to me that we're breaking down American isolation. Hands across the sea and all that! The English-speaking union!"

She laughed excitedly as he held her for a moment.

"God's in His Heaven. All's right with the world!" he answered. "If it weren't for Adolf Hitler and a few others this world would be a peaceful and happy place, fit for lovers to live in."

That was not the only time they mentioned this subject, with its bearing upon future plans and financial affairs. It was decided with John's approval that Robin and Judy should live together in St. Leonard's Terrace as soon as a perfectly good parson could join them in holy matrimony, and remain there until John's own future was more definitely decided by Fate and Mr. Lansing, or more probably by Anne herself. She might like to live in the United States. New York might capture her. On the other hand she might insist on a quick return to England, in which case John would have to do some propaganda work at his head office, supported from London by Mr. Franklin Speed, who had already pledged his sympathetic aid.

It was on the way to a dinner-party with Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Speed that John announced his failure in persuading Anne to marry him before the date of sailing.

"I won't say she has broken my heart again," he told his sister, "but she's bent it slightly. I had set my heart on presenting her to the boys who got on board at the Battery as my lawful wedded wife. I wanted to see Charlie Seligmann's expression when he was introduced to Lady Anne Barton. And I wanted to be quite sure that I had married a lovely lady before she could change her mind."

Judy squeezed his hand for a moment.

"I hope it will work out all right," she said. "I hope Anne will like American life. They'll give her a good time over there. But, John dear, your black tie leaves much to be desired."

In the taxi she readjusted his tie.

"Anne is going to be there," he told her, although she knew already. "That's very thoughtful of old Franklin Speed, don't you think? David is bringing her in his car. I'm feeling mighty nervous for some reason I can't explain."

Judy guessed his reason but didn't explain it.

It was because Anne would make her first appearance as John's future wife at an American dinner-table. Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Speed would size her up in their shrewd New England way. And there might be other American guests who would be watchful of this English girl and secretly critical of her style and manners.

There were two other American guests. They were Bryan Feversham and his sister Diana, who had come over on a short trip. It would be a little awkward for John Barton and he felt slightly embarrassed, though perhaps there was no reason for embarrassment. In his green youth he had been much attracted by the beauty of Diana. Before going to Europe he had dreamed dreams about her in the New York subway and other odd and crowded places not generally recognized as good dreaming grounds. Now, after kissing Judy, Diana put him at his ease by kind and quick enthusiasm.

"Oh, John, all my congratulations on your engagement to Lady Anne. How wonderful! We're so proud of you."

"I'm proud of myself," said John humbly. "The lady in question has been very gracious to a junior reporter."

"Oh, I don't know about that," answered Diana quickly. "It's her luck, John."

That was very gallant of her, he thought with gratitude.

Bryan Feversham, who, in years gone by, had been a fellow conspirator of John's at Harvard, was pump-handling his left hand and laughing very cheerfully.

"All this beats the band," he said. "It's the cat's whiskers. Our old John who came to England like a man from Missouri, in a suit from the peg terrible enough to frighten any well-dressed Englishman, makes the catch of the season by getting engaged to the prettiest girl in London and the cynosure of all eyes! Our old John, true-hearted democrat, with strong leanings to the Left, is affianced to the daughter of a belted earl, whose family has trodden on the necks of its serfs and peasants for a thousand years and more! John, you're a double-faced old hypocrite! You're a traitor to your revolutionary principles. You're a darned old guy and we're all proud of you, as Diana said before me."

They returned to formality when Lady Anne Ede came into the room of this little house in Hampstead with her brother David.

Mr. Franklin Speed held ~~her~~ hand for a moment.

"Lady Anne," he said, "it gives Mrs. Speed and myself great pleasure to meet you in our modest home. There's been something about you and John Barton in the papers. We have a good deal of appreciation for John because of his brilliant work as a European observer, and because we like him for himself. Mrs. Speed and I feel much honoured that you have consented to dine with us tonight."

He presented her to Mrs. Speed and his guests Bryan and Diana. In Bryan's case there was no need of a new introduction and she greeted him graciously by his Christian name.

"Hullo, Bryan! You haven't danced with me for quite a time. When did I see you last?"

"At Lady Martindale's," answered Bryan, flattered by this friendly recognition. "We sat on gilded chairs and listened to some bad music. Terrible, wasn't it? This is my sister Diana. She's come over to buy some frocks."

"Oh, we might go shopping together," said Anne, very sweetly. "I shall have to get something to wear before I sail for New York. Perhaps Diana would help me with a little advice on the subject. I should like to wear the right thing in New York."

"That would be perfectly delightful!" cried Diana. "But you won't need any advice of mine. New York will go crazy about you if I know anything about New York!"

John began to feel less nervous. Anne was making a very fine impression, he thought. They were all falling in love with her already.

He was the last she greeted in the room, and he was aware that they were being watched by the company. She said nothing at all to him, but met his eyes with a smile and held out her hand, which he raised to his lips. In his secret heart some words which he had spoken before that evening repeated themselves.

"God's in His Heaven. All's right with the world!"

Regarding the world, that was an illusion of his which he knew to be false, and at the dinner-table there was considerable conversation about its unsatisfactory and perilous state. This was started by another guest who had arrived a quarter of an hour after the others. He was an English peer—Lord Halkin of Wavertree—whom John knew by name and repute as one of the Liberal leaders in the House of Lords, critical of, if not entirely hostile to, the Liberal leadership in the House of Commons. He was a tall, thin man of middle age with hunched shoulders and a consumptive look, but with fine luminous eyes.

It was Mr. Franklin Speed who gave him a lead.

"What do you think of today's great news?" he asked.

"I confess I was taken by surprise."

It was the news that Mr. Chamberlain had announced his intention of bringing in a form of conscription for military service.

"I heard the debate in the House this afternoon," said Lord Halkin. "The Liberals, I regret to say, joined with the Socialists in denouncing a measure of defence forced upon the Government by those new commitments in Europe which the Opposition have clamoured for since they abandoned their love of peace for a general desire to fight everybody everywhere."

Mr. Franklin Speed smiled in his dry way.

"I must say I see the inconsistency. But perhaps their criticism was directed more to Mr. Chamberlain having come to his decision without consulting them than to military service itself in England's hour of need."

Lord Halkin nodded.

"Perhaps so! But it amounted to the same thing. They keep goading that poor man and accusing him of cowardice and weakness in the face of the dictators in a way which would cause most statesmen to lose their tempers badly. But I must say that Mr. Chamberlain shows the most extraordinary self-restraint and almost angelic patience."

It was Bryan Feversham who followed up this line of conversation.

"Do you think French pressure had anything to do with Mr. Chamberlain's decision?"

"Undoubtedly," said Lord Halkin. "They've been exerting every kind of pressure to bring it about. I don't blame them. Now that we've abandoned the policy of appeasement because of Hitler's broken pledges, and made Danzig a dead line between war and peace, we must look to our man-power and raise an expeditionary force. France may have to defend herself on three fronts."

He spoke for some time about Italy, which he seemed to know well.

"The Italians loathe the Berlin-Rome Axis," he said

"in spite of all the flaming nonsense written by Signor Gayda and others. They regard with horror the possibility of a war with England."

"I agree," said Mr. Franklin Speed. "We get reports to that effect from many sources."

"What about bribing Mussolini with a nice big loan?" asked Anne from her side of the table.

There was a general laugh.

"Fine, Lady Anne," said Bryan Feversham.

Lord Halkin smiled and shook his head.

"It's not as easy as all that. But we ought to make a fair and friendly offer to him and induce him to throw his weight on the side of European peace."

The conversation shifted to another point.

"What is your reaction upon Hitler's answer to Mr. Roosevelt's question about the fears of the smaller nations?" asked Mr. Franklin Speed. "American opinion, as far as I've read it, is not favourably impressed by the dialectical effort of the German Führer."

Lord Halkin answered with a sudden smile twisting his thin lips.

"Hitler is diabolically clever. Of course none of the smaller nations to whom he had sent a questionnaire dared confess that they were frightened of him."

Anne was sitting next to John, who spoke to her in a low voice.

"Does this conversation amuse you?"

"I'm quite interested," said Anne. "Are you getting bored?"

"Let's get off politics," said John.

Anne was very clever, he thought, in leading the conversation to a lighter topic.

"Do you think the coming visit of the King and Queen will have a good effect in the United States?"

She addressed this question to Mr. Speed, who seemed to like it.

"If I know anything about my own people, they'll fall

for King George and Queen Elizabeth, and especially perhaps for that very gracious lady."

"I'm going back in time for the visit," said Diana Feversham. "I wouldn't miss it for the world. We're all getting very excited about it. All the leading ladies in New York are practising to make curtsies. All the men are learning to bow from the waist."

"There'll be some very comical incidents," said Bryan Feversham. "I can see some of those old dears making the most frightful *gaffes* in the presence of Royalty."

Anne Ede had started a trail of discussion which was more amusing than world politics. It continued on her side of the table until the ladies followed the lead of Mrs. Speed into the drawing-room, leaving the men to their wine and cigars.

John drew his chair closer to David Ede, his future brother-in-law.

"How do you like the idea of going to Washington?" he asked.

"I find it rather alarming. I don't know the first thing about American politics. Perhaps you could give me a few useful lessons."

"They're highly complicated and very confused," said John. "I've lost touch with them somewhat. The United States are now divided between those who support Mr. Roosevelt's New Deal and those who will go any lengths—fair or foul—in thwarting his policy and plans."

"Well, that seems fairly simple," said David, "but I dare say there are other factors."

"I'm nervous about Anne," confessed John. "If she doesn't like our American ways I'm a lost soul."

David laughed in his quiet way.

"You people may not like her English manner," he suggested. "The Edes are all very English. Anne gives offence sometimes because she resents criticism of our English way of life."

Lord Halkin was saying something about the inter-

national situation again. It was necessary to listen to him.

"Chamberlain still keeps open the door for conciliation and peace with Germany if Hitler will talk on those lines. But I'm afraid he won't now. I'm afraid he's extended his ambitions as far as domination over South-east Europe, and I don't see how we're going to stop him, even if we check him in the west. Of course in the long run Germany is bound to break—from internal weakness and the hostility of other people who still cherish their liberties. But before this break they can fling the whole of Europe into the furnace fires. That appals me. Sometimes I think our best policy even now would be to hark back to isolation, strengthening the defences of the British Empire, guaranteeing the defence of France, of course, and including in our defensive zone the Scandinavian countries with Holland and Belgium. Then if we could create a zone of free trade between all those nations and the United States we should be in a very strong position of defence, and create a new domain of prosperity covering the greater part of the earth's surface. It would be a kind of federation of the liberty-loving Powers. I have that dream sometimes."

"Another dreamer!" thought John Barton. "England is the House of Dreams, while Hitler goes ahead with his plans for world domination and the break-up of the British Empire."

"Shall we join the ladies?" asked Mr. Franklin Speed presently.

In the drawing-room the ladies were talking vivaciously. Diana Feversham came over to John and spoke to him quietly.

"I've fallen for your Lady Anne," she told him. "She's wonderful. I'm crazy about her."

"So am I!" said John, very pleased with this verdict.

XX

OUR friend John Barton had only a week left in London before his sailing date on the *Aquitania*. By the kind influence of Mr. Franklin Speed good berths on B Deck had been arranged at minimum rates for Anne, David and himself. He looked forward to the trip as a happy adventure on a sea of enchantment. He had fallen for Anne, he remembered, during his first Atlantic passage, from New York to Southampton, and it was a romantic thread of plot which led him to make the return journey as her pledged and plighted man. He would make love to her on A deck, B deck and C deck. They would get closer to each other's minds and hearts in those sea hours when two deck-chairs are placed side by side where the sun falls on the scrubbed planks. He would dance with her night after night until perhaps they left the dance floor to watch the moonlight on the waters and the long white wake behind the ship under a star-strewn sky—if there happened to be any moon, and if there happened to be any stars. All his fellow passengers would envy him, because he held in his arms this flower of English beauty. Of course they would sit at the captain's table and he would be pleasantly aware of glances in their direction and the whispered comments of American women going back in time for the visit of England's King and Queen.

"See that beautiful girl at the captain's table? That's Lady Anne Ede, you know ; and that tall young man sitting next to her is John Barton of the *New York Observer*. Yes, he's engaged to her. I saw it in *The Times*. Sweet, isn't it?"

John found himself day-dreaming in this infatuated

way, when he was walking up Fleet Street on the way to his London office or dashing around in a taxi to get fitted for some new English clothes before he sailed, or settling some of the innumerable small details of private business, such as bills to pay, income tax to worry out, before this end of his English adventure or its temporary interruption.

He did not see much of Anne during that last week. She and Diana were having an orgy of shopping and Anne was spending most of her days with dressmakers. In the evenings John himself was hard pressed. Old Lansing of the New York office—without bowels of compassion, he thought—had demanded by cable a series of articles summing up the European situation following Mr. Chamberlain's enactment of compulsory military service and his endeavour to establish a peace front which Germany insisted was encirclement.

Certainly John Barton was a hard-pressed young man, and his last days in England were not long enough for him to do all the things he wanted to do and felt bound to do. He did not want to slip away from his English friends without a farewell word. Now that he was leaving them his heart warmed to them. They had gone out of their way to be friendly and hospitable. His first sense of antagonism, his contempt of their English accent which to American ears had sounded conceited and affected, his first resentment of any humorous criticism of the United States, had all gone and was hardly remembered by him. He had knocked at many little doors. They opened to him gladly, in Bloomsbury, in Chelsea, up at Hampstead. He knew his way into hidden places often in a mews, or a little street of little houses which once had been part of the London slums, but now, behind brightly painted doors and window-sills with flowers in the boxes, were the dwelling-places of charming people who made a joke of poverty and lived precariously on a high intellectual level. They were the intelligentzia of the Left. They were the readers of the *New Statesman* and *Time and Tide*. They

hated Hitler with ferocity because of his cruelty to Jews and the Nazi persecution of free thought and free speech which to them was the essence of life and its only compensation. Hating war, they had a grudge against Mr. Chamberlain because he had dodged it at Munich. Lovers of peace and all humanity, they were willing to risk a world war and general ruin, including the aerial destruction of their little houses or two-room flats in fortress-like blocks, because they loathed tyranny in all its forms—except in Russia which, even now, put some kind of spell upon them as though in spite of all its blood and all its agony it held for them the vision of a Brave New World.

John had argued with them, laughed at them, sat up late at night with them consuming innumerable cups of tea, smoking cigarettes incessantly, with occasional nourishment in the form of fried sausages, cooked on the spot in miniature kitchens by pretty ladies in pretty pinafores, who smoked while they prepared these little meals and dropped their cigarette-ash in the frying-pan. How could he leave all these dear people without a good-bye or an *au revoir*?

He spent a fortune in taxis and fresh-cut flowers. He was kissed affectionately by young married women who regretted his departure, and by young unmarried women of literary and artistic avocations who were surprised but gratified by this visit from an American sentimentalist, unduly emotional, they thought, because he was going away from England and putting three thousand miles between himself and the danger zone.

"I can't see why you should shed tears about it, darling," said one of the contributors to *Time and Tide*, in a small flat off Knightsbridge. She was a red-headed young woman who smoked cigarettes through an ivory holder six inches long, which she removed only for conversational purposes.

"I'm not shedding tears," said John; "but I can feel drops of blood oozing out of my heart at the thought of this sad farewell."

"My dear idiot," said the lady, "you're saying farewell to a country and people on the eve of very unpleasant things, and with only a gas mask between them and perdition."

She glanced for a second at something hanging on a peg above a Della Robbia figure of the Virgin and Child.

"I only wish to God I could find a decent excuse for escape from this inevitable war which is going to blow us all to bits. But there's no decent excuse for any of us—and no bomb-proof shelters either."

"If there's trouble," said John, "I shall come back."

"Then you're a greater fool than I thought you were, John Barton," said the lady severely. "Oh, a perfect nitwit, my dear."

"I'm going to marry an English girl," said John. "She'll drag me back. She'll insist on being with her own folk in time of danger."

"Oh yes," said the red-headed young woman. "I read something about that. Lady Anne Ede. One of the old families and all that! Oh, well, of course you're for it. I know that kind of wench. She'll probably be driving an armoured car or squirting morphia into the arms of mutilated men in Pall Mall and Piccadilly. They did that kind of thing in the last war. They were a damn' nuisance, I'm told."

"Anne has the spirit of Queen Elizabeth," said John reverently, "and the heart of Florence Nightingale."

"Then God help you!" said the girl. "You'd have done better to marry an artist's model or a little bit of fluff. You can always spank them when they're naughty."

"Well, good-bye," said John. "Good luck. I hope that war isn't going to happen. If I know anything about Chamberlain——"

He glanced round this little room to memorize it. It was one of those rooms where sometimes he had sat on cushions eating miniature sausages and drinking tomato-juice and gin in intellectual company, discussing birth

control, Jews, *Mein Kampf*, the articles of Norman Angell, Anthony Eden's chances of leadership, the poetry of Humbert Wolff, the pictures of Nevinston, A. P. Herbert's Bill of Divorcement, and other stimulating topics.

"It's too early to abuse Mr. Chamberlain," said the lady, whose politics were on the Left, "and I'd hate to part from you with hard words."

She held out her cheek to him and he put his arms round her and kissed her.

"Give my love to your husband," he said.

It was impossible not to feel emotional, he found. He was leaving England at a time of extreme danger, as some truly believed. The German Press was filled with fury, thinly disguised by harsh ridicule and professed contempt for the British Government's decision to introduce conscription.

The question of Danzig was boiling over. The whole German Press, controlled by the baton of Dr. Goebbels, was concentrated against Poland and alleged Polish atrocities. The memory of the September crisis still haunted him. They had been two and a half hours away from war, according to the British Ambassador in Berlin and other sources of information. During those days he had been stricken by the horror of the things which would happen to this land and the people whom he had come to love.

He saw something of their new spirit—rather grim and very resolute. There had been a rush of recruits to the Territorial Army before the passing of compulsory service. He had gone round to the Duke of York's School, a stone's throw from his own house, and had seen the long queues of young men pressing forward to join up as volunteers before midnight. They were very quiet. There was no singing or shouting, though they passed a few jokes among themselves or stood thoughtful and silent. They were of all classes, he noticed. Among them were shop assistants, young clerks, costers and labourers, and lads who looked like Paul Langdon, from public schools. Some of them were weedy-looking and pale-faced, but on

the whole he was struck by their physique and quality and look of intelligence.

He spoke to a few of them and they answered civilly.

"Joining up before the clock strikes twelve?"

"That's the idea," said one of them in a sports jacket and grey flannel trousers. "Otherwise we get lagged by compulsion. An American, aren't you?"

"A newspaper man," said John.

The boy grinned at him.

"Well, tell your paper that we don't believe a word they print. The more papers the more lies. Sorry and all that!"

"Why this unbelief?" asked John.

"All this war scare. Everybody's got the jitters because of what the papers say."

"Then why are you joining up?" asked John.

"Oh, well, we've got to be prepared, of course. If Adolf asks for it, he'll get it all right. But he won't ask, in my opinion. He's not such a fool as all that."

Another joined in the conversation.

They agreed that a 'spot' of military service wouldn't do them any harm. It might be interesting. Anyhow, England had to be prepared.

"Well, good luck!" said John.

"Cheerio!" said the boys.

He walked away from them. It was nearly midnight. St. Leonard's Terrace was deserted of all human beings. He glanced up at his own house, the little old eighteenth-century house, where his mother and Judy were already in bed, no doubt. He had had some happy hours there—and anxious ones. He wondered if he would leave a touch of himself, some vibrations of his mind, in those rooms where Katherine Langdon, the novelist's wife, had felt good vibrations.

"My little home in England," he said aloud. "Soon it will all be like a dream."

He wondered if Anne were asleep yet and sent her a good-night message through the ether.

"Going away, I hear," said his friend the policeman, who came along on his night beat.

"Only for a time, perhaps," said John.

"Well, don't stay away too long," said the policeman, "or you mayn't be able to find your house again. The Germans may have made a mess of it."

He added some reassuring words in the Cockney dialect:

"I don't think! Them Germans won't take on the British Empire and other bits and pieces here and there. They know what happened last time. Besides, in my judgment—not that I know, of course—they want peace as much as we do. It's only bluff, bless you, and now we've called it. See? Well, good night, sir."

"If it comes to a battle of nerves again," said John to himself, "I'd back the nerve of England. They're getting sure of themselves again. And that's my message to the United States."

There was a lamp burning in the top room of the house three doors away. Peter Langdon was still working, or awake. Probably he was thinking out some way to peace, some last chance of pushing off that inevitable war. He would know by now that his son Paul had made up his mind to join the Air Force.

"Poor old Langdon," thought John. "He's a tortured man."

He opened the door of his little house for almost the last time, he remembered. His mother and Judy had gone to bed. In the hall was one of his steamer trunks which Judy had packed for him. America was coming closer. Soon he would be in the roar of New York. And Anne would be there with its sky castles, beautiful at night, to add to its beauty.

XXI

ON the evening before the *Aquitania* was due to sail from Southampton, John went round to say good-bye to the Langdons. All his packing had been done and everything was arranged with his mother and Judy and Anne. He felt a kind of relief at the thought that by that time tomorrow he would be on the peace of the sea with no immediate botheration.

Judy was going to marry Robin at the beginning of May. They would have a quiet wedding in the old church where Sir Thomas More, that great gentleman, had said his prayers before being taken to the Tower from his house in Chelsea.

Anne was still packing with the help, or hindrance, of Marjorie and two maids. He had just left her looking excited and amused. Diana Feversham was going back by the same boat, partly, she said, for the privilege of travelling with Anne, though Anne herself did not quite believe that and had certain suspicions of a sudden attraction for David.

"Well," said John, "it's going to be a happy ship. Youth at the helm and pleasure at the prow!"

"I hope I shan't be seasick," said Anne apprehensively. "Romance is apt to be spoilt sometimes by high seas."

She had allowed him to embrace her before the two maids and Marjorie, though not without a laughing protest.

"See you tomorrow," said John. "Don't oversleep yourself, my dear."

Then he had taken a taxi to Langdon's little house, very different from that mid-Victorian mansion in Belgrave Place.

Langdon gripped his hand for a moment when John was shown into his study.

"This is a sad business," he said. "I shall miss you a good deal, Barton."

John embarrassed him by thanks for all his kindness to a strange American.

"You were first to make me feel at home in England," he said. "You and Katherine and young Paul. And you helped me to break down prejudices and hard-boiled convictions by teaching me tolerance, charity and goodwill to all men, be they Germans, Jews or Hottentots. Yes, sir! I'm a broader man due to your precepts and example, though I have occasional lapses in favour of hard-hitting and the Big Stick."

He talked lightly to cover his sentimental regard for the Langdon family.

Langdon laughed nervously at this tribute and brushed it aside.

"Heaven knows what will happen in the next few months," he said. "I'll write to you now and then and let you know that we're still alive—if we are."

"Do," said John. "I shall be very grateful. And I shall be glad if you and Katherine will keep an eye on my mother and Judy."

"Of course," said Langdon. "Judy and I are great friends. At least I hope so. She's always very kind to me. And Katherine regards her as a ray of sunshine in a leaden-hued existence. I shall be busy on a new book, but there's always time for real friendship."

"What's the subject of your new masterpiece?" asked John. "I'll be an advance agent for it in the U.S.A."

Langdon laughed for a moment and hesitated before announcing the title of his new work.

"I thought of calling it *Conspiracy for Peace*."

"Great title!" said John, after thinking it out. "I'd like to be one of the conspirators."

"You can," said Langdon earnestly. "That's my idea

of the novel—a group of men meeting in some restaurant in Soho or some cheap place where they can get together and talk. They're just ordinary fellows of fair intelligence and they start talking about the menace of war and so on."

"I've heard some of that talk," said John, humouring him a little. "We've done some of it ourselves, Langdon."

"Exactly," answered the man of letters. "It's the kind of talk which took place in this room when Gerald Link and that scientist—you remember—were putting up their ideas about the present situation. There would be others. I have a little Chinese fellow in my mind, steeped in Confucius, and an eye-witness of the horror of the Japanese invasion of his own land. Then there might be an American journalist like yourself, and a French playwright or politician. Also a German ex-officer with some business in London—perhaps a German prince, more or less in exile but in touch with the German people.

"They all discuss the last hopes of peace, believing that if war happens it will be the final calamity of Europe and the beginning of the new Dark Ages. Anyhow, they put out various ideas for saving peace. Mineral sanctions. Secret propaganda among the peoples. A super-powerful wireless station for broadcasting a call to peace and powerful enough to jam out war propaganda and false news."

"Say, that's a good plot!" said John, with some enthusiasm. "I'll certainly read that novel."

Langdon was under the spell of his own idea, and there was a kind of light in his eyes, the flame of his imagination.

"One of the men—a man with unusual quality of character—suddenly makes a suggestion. 'Why don't we get busy about all this? Why don't we do something to save mankind from all this horror ahead? Let's make a conspiracy for peace, though it may mean death for some of us. We, at this table, will be the first conspirators. We will work secretly in every country until there's a world-wide conspiracy, not operating with bombs or

machine-guns but with spiritual weapons to overthrow the warmongers.'

"That's the beginning of the plot. One follows out the adventures of those six or seven men in Europe and China and the United States. Of course they get up against the enormous forces of evil now in power and against vested interests, political enmities, national hatreds, and so on. But in the end they win. In the end, my dear Barton, they win!"

He laughed as though he saw this victory.

"Gosh! That's great stuff!" said Barton. "That book will sell a million copies. I shall buy one—or even two!"

Langdon was suddenly abashed by having talked so much about his new idea and he became self-conscious and apologetic.

"Good heavens, what an egoist I am! Like all literary men. Here I am boring you to death with my vague idea of a new novel when you've come to say good-bye and have a thousand things to do! My dear fellow, please forgive me. You know that I value your friendship very deeply. Katherine and I will often think of you and hope for your return."

It was in a casual way, without revealing the emotion which John knew was in his mind, that he spoke later about his son.

"Paul is giving up academic studies at Cambridge," he said. "He's decided to join the Air Force."

"Yes," said John. "He told me he was thinking about it."

"I admire his spirit," said Langdon. "Of course, his mother and I will worry about him a good deal. These fast-flying machines——"

He turned away for a moment to straighten a book in one of his shelves.

Then Katherine came up and spoke about Anne and hoped he would be very happy with her.

"We shall look after Judy when you're away," she said.

He found it hard to leave these friends. When he said good-bye to them at last, Katherine Langdon had a little sadness in her beautiful eyes though she smiled with her lips.

"Give my love to the United States," she said.

"I certainly will," said John. "I'll shout it to the skyscrapers—I will proclaim it from great heights."

Langdon did not mind when a tall young American put his arms round his wife and kissed her on the cheek.

"You've been terribly kind to me," he said. "I'm terribly cut up at leaving all my friends."

XXII

As he stepped into the hall of his own little house three doors away and switched on the electric light he gave a glance at the steamer trunks lined up against the wall.

On the mat were some letters and circulars of the usual kind. He could smell German propaganda in one of the envelopes with a familiar shape and stamp. There were two pamphlets on Franco's Spain and another on Palestine. He knew the look of them.

He was alone in the house. Judy and his mother were dining with the Edes. He had promised to fetch them at half past ten, and it was now a quarter past by the clock on Chelsea Hospital where the old pensioners were going to bed or staggering homewards with a tap of their sticks on the hard pavement.

John went into the dining-room and switched on the light. This was the last time he would do so for some uncertain period, and he looked round the room as though he saw it with new eyes. He had liked those prints on the wall which he had bought in a shop along King's Road. He liked the Toby jug—a Ralph Wood of 1790 or thereabouts. Judy had picked that up at a sale. He liked the polished Queen Anne table—or a pretty good fake if it wasn't Queen Anne. One day he would bring Anne here, if he had any luck. It would be their home in England, if he had any luck.

The telephone bell was ringing in the hall. He had hated that telephone sometimes, pulling him away from a little dinner-party by instructions from the office to get on to some story which had excited New York, or interrupting his work just as he was getting down to it. Well,

this was the last time he would be troubled, as the young women operators said when they got his number wrong. Probably it was Judy ringing to see if he had come back.

But it wasn't Judy. It was a colleague in his London office.

"That you, Barton?"

"Yep!"

"A cable from the chief in New York. Urgent. Shall I read it out?"

"Doesn't he know I'm sailing tomorrow morning?" asked John.

There was a moment's silence at the other end and then a short laugh.

"I'd better read it. Begins :

"Tell Barton postpone sailing date stop Want him go Berlin Prague Vienna Rome stop Tell him get lowdown on latest political moves stop Milligan will cover Royal visit this end stop Lansing."

John Barton seemed to be quite a long time before he answered, so that his colleague was uncertain if he were still on the line.

"You there, Barton?"

"I believe I am," said Barton.

"Did you get it?"

"I didn't get it," said Barton. "I'm sailing tomorrow. See? Cable that old son of a—well, cable Mr. Lansing, and tell him that his message arrived too late and that I'm sailing according to arrangement. Did you get that? I'm sailing. Did you hear what I said?"

His colleague at the other end of the wire paused and then spoke with a little nervous laugh.

"Say, Barton, old man, it's none of my affair. But you know the Chief. He's fired many a good man for disobeying instructions."

"The hell he has," said Barton, with white rage. "Well, that's what I want. He can fire me to Hell and Hades, but I'm sailing tomorrow."

"Think it over, Barton," said his friendly colleague on night duty in the London office. "Sleep on it! Well, good night and happy dreams."

John Barton dropped the receiver as though it were made of burning embers. He strode back into his little dining-room like a wild man. He was a wild man. He was so wild that he went pacing round the Queen Anne table, or a pretty good fake, if it wasn't Queen Anne, like a lion hungry for raw meat. His eyes blazed with anger. His face was dead white. He uttered very disrespectful things in a loud voice concerning Mr. Lansing, proprietor and editor of the *New York Observer*. He included in his imprecations Charlie Seligmann, his best friend on the other side, the whole staff of the *Observer*, the entire New York Press, its associated newspapers as far as San Francisco and the whole newspaper tradition of the United States since the time of Benjamin Franklin.

Didn't they know he had booked his passage on the *Aquitania*? Didn't they know that he was going with Lady Anne Ede to whom he was very happily engaged? Didn't they know that they couldn't play about with a man's life like that? Didn't they know that John Barton was a fellow of moral courage and decent upbringing who utterly declined to be fooled around by this kind of thing? Hadn't he set his heart on the transatlantic crossing with his future wife? Was he going to miss that great joy and privilege because old man Lansing wanted him to do another tour in the European cockpit? No, sir! Was he going to sail tomorrow as arranged? Yes, sir! And no mistake about that!

John went out into the hall, jammed a felt hat on his head, switched off half a dozen lights, kicked one of his steamer trunks and went out of the front door like a streak of lightning.

"Taxi! Say, Constable, where can I get a taxi in this benighted spot?"

"In a hurry, eh?" said his friendly 'copper.' "Not

murdered anybody, I hope? You couldn't very well have burgled your own house, eh?"

"I want a taxi," said John.

"Well, you've got a taxi," said the policeman good-naturedly. "Just in the nick of time, eh?"

He opened the door of that vehicle, which he wouldn't have done for anyone he liked less than this American in St. Leonard's Terrace.

"What address?" he asked. "Madame Tussaud's Waxworks or a night club in Soho?"

John gave him a number in Belgrave Place which he passed on to the driver.

They were just making a fool of him, thought John inside the cab. He had said good-bye to all his friends. He had indulged in sentimental farewells. He had been kissed by pretty women who liked him. He had said 'Good-bye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square'. It would be utterly absurd if he were forced to do it all over again. Well, he was sailing tomorrow, whatever happened. He was sailing with Anne. He would send a pretty hot cable to old man Lansing from board ship.

The front door of the house in Belgrave Place was opened by a young footman whom John recognized as the lad who had once driven him to the Edes' country house from Horsham station.

"Good evening," said John. "I'll walk upstairs."

He noticed a number of steamer trunks in the hall. It looked as though Anne and David had finished their packing, though probably Anne would have a lot of light luggage for the trip.

"What name?" asked the young footman doubtfully.

"My mother and sister are up there," said John shortly.

"I haven't come to steal the spoons."

He took the stairs two at a time and then stood for a moment outside the drawing-room door smoothing down his ruffled hair and trying to smooth down his ruffled spirit. It wouldn't do to make a scene in this drawing-room.

The English were calm in moments of crisis. Anne was very English.

He could hear laughter inside the room—Anne's bell-like laugh, and Judy's rather more explosive mirth. Then he opened the door quietly and went in. Robin Bramley was there in a lounge suit, David Ede in a dinner suit with black tie. Anne and Judy sat with them at a card table playing some game which was not bridge. It seemed to be snap, judging from that word called out by Anne.

She was the first to see him come in.

"Hullo, John," she said. "We're having a little gambling game. I've won three shillings. Don't take Judy away. It's quite early."

Judy was quick to see something wrong with him by the troubled look in his eyes.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

He laughed quietly.

"No, nothing wrong. Only a slight annoyance."

"Lost your collar-stud?" asked Anne. "I had an awful squash packing my dressing-case and I know I've left a thousand little things behind."

"What's wrong, John?" asked Judy quickly. She knew every shade of his expressions, every sign of trouble in his eyes.

"Didn't I say there was nothing wrong?" he answered almost grumpily. "It's only some nonsense from the office."

"What kind of nonsense?" asked Anne, shuffling the pack of cards.

John laughed as though telling a good joke.

"My chief in New York—we shall be seeing him soon—seems to be going gaga. He wants me to postpone sailing to do another look round Europe. Of course I shan't take any notice of it. One has to ignore that kind of idiot's delight."

There was a moment's silence broken by Judy.

"Oh, John. You can't ignore it. Mr. Lansing might fire you!"

"Let him," said John. "What does that matter? I'm sailing tomorrow."

"John!" said Judy again. "I know what a frightful disappointment it would be not to go with Anne, but, John, your career—everything you've worked for——"

"That's all right, Judy," said John. "I'm sailing tomorrow."

Anne stood up and left the card table, and came over to where John stood with his back to the fire-place.

"My dear," she said, "won't you have to be brave about it?"

She held out her hands and he raised them to his lips.

"I'm feeling terribly brave," he said, smiling at her. "Not even old man Lansing can frighten me now."

"Brave in a more difficult way," said Anne. "Brave enough to obey orders even if it means such a lot to you."

"I'm sailing tomorrow," said John quietly.

She put her hands on his shoulders and looked him in the eyes and spoke one word which had no meaning for him.

"Soldiers!" she said.

"I don't get that," he confessed.

She turned to her brother David and spoke to him with smiling eyes.

"David, you remember, don't you?"

"Rather," said David. "When we were kids and hurt our knee or took a toss from our pony, or had a cold which kept us away from a kid's party, someone said 'Soldiers!' That meant we mustn't squeal. The family tradition."

"That's it," said Anne. "That's why I'm saying 'Soldiers' to John."

"I'm not squealing," said John. "But I'm not staying over."

She put her cheek against his for a moment and whispered to him.

"Another week or two," she said. "I'll wait for you in New York."

"No," said John. "I'm coming with you, Anne."

She laughed and said something else which he didn't quite like at the moment.

"There's an old line in an old poem. It might help you. How does it go?"

"God knows," said John gloomily.

"I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more,"

quoted Anne.

"How's honour involved?" said John. "I can't see it."

"Oh yes, you can," said Anne. "You're the honourable John. You couldn't let down your newspaper, could you, just because you wanted a nice time on a big ship?"

"I'd let down the entire American Press," said John very fiercely. "Or rather it's they that are letting me down."

"Supposing you get the sack?" asked Anne. "What then? Where do I come in as the affianced bride of an out-of-work journalist?"

"Exactly!" said David Ede in his judicial way. "And New York is very expensive, isn't it?"

Robin Bramley came over to John and gripped his arm.

"It's a lamentable business," he said, "but as a friend and future brother-in-law, I repeat an old English adage very helpful in time of trouble. 'Make a virtue of necessity', old boy. I've never followed the rule myself but I pass it on as one of the gems of ancient wisdom."

"Oh, hell!" said John Barton. He was very sore about it. It was very hard on him that Anne should be sailing to New York without him. His face was tragic when he held her tight in his arms in the Pullman car at Waterloo station before the whistle blew. He had lost her again for a few weeks.

That night he crossed over to Bremen alone, on his way to Berlin.

XXIII

ROBIN BRAMLEY's dangerous lady—he thought her very dangerous—was as good as her word in sitting for her portrait as an air warden in the county of Sussex, complete with gas mask. At the end of her sittings she had produced a cheque tucked into a scented envelope which was duly honoured at the bank.

Judy had been present at some of these sittings in accordance with Robin's insistence that he should be strictly chaperoned, and was able to study the temperament and character of that lovely lady Vera, Countess of Munstead. Beneath her pose of boredom and moral decadence she had a very acute sense of humour, a lively, though hidden, intelligence, and, what was more surprising, a kind heart. Judy, making work for herself in the studio and touching up one of her own studies, listened with amusement, and sometimes with amazement, to verbal duels between Robin and Vera. They were devastatingly frank about each other and about life, love and mutual friends. Robin was extraordinarily rude to her at times and occasionally almost cruel, but she took it as part of his humorous stock-in-trade and seemed to enjoy these sword-thrusts she parried with ease and laughter.

"Has Judy found you out yet?" she asked one afternoon, when she was sitting for him but getting a little restless.

"Keep still, woman," said Robin sternly. "How do you think I'm going to reproduce your detestable beauty if you keep squirming around like a skinned eel? And what do you mean by that question? Found me out in what? I'm an open book. All who run may read."

"You're a false and smiling humbug, Robin," said Vera. "You're one of the world's fakes, but I found you out years ago, and I've a good mind to tell Judy."

"You can tell her what you damn' well please," said

Robin. "She loves me with all my faults. She loves the simplicity of my soul. Don't you, my little Minnehaha?"

Judy's eyes twinkled.

"I'm rather attracted by you, Robin. I'm taking all risks."

"Judy," said Vera, "this man who has so charmed you by his pose of gaiety and forced laughter is a Melancholy Jacques! He pretends to be a flippant cynic laughing at life. Shall I tell you what he really is?"

"Do," said Judy. "I think I can stand it."

"He's an idealist!" said Vera in a low voice, as though revealing something very terrible.

"Good heavens!" said Robin, looking deeply shocked. "That's the worst thing that has ever been said about me. Men and women have been killed for less than that!"

"Truth will out," said Vera. "I discovered it when you were in love with me, Robin."

"I was never in love with you," said Robin. "I was only under the evil spell of a modern Circe who turns her lovers into swine."

"Oh, Robin!" cried Judy, really shocked at these awful words.

Vera laughed lightly.

"No, you can't get out of it like that, Robin! Of course I know that attack is always the safest form of defence, but I'm not letting you off. I feel it's my duty to let this child know the dark secret which you try to hide under protective camouflage."

"She won't believe you," answered Robin, holding up his brush to measure her nose in relation to her brow.

"Judy," said Vera, "this man who keeps you laughing by his well-worn jests hides in his heart the yearning of an idealist to reform the morals of humanity and to make a heaven on earth. He conceals his dark despair because those ideals are thwarted by the wickedness of mankind and the naughtiness of women."

Robin addressed a few remarks to Judy.

"Did you ever hear such nonsense, Judy darling? It's

positively painful to listen to such lying slanders. Me an idealist? Ha, ha! As the villain of the Vic used to say in the wings of transpontine melodrama, 'A day will come! Unhand me, woman!'"

"He goes about," said Vera, "pretending to be quite careless of life's little ironies, a hardened man who can scoff at them in brave defiance of Fate. All humbug, my dear! His heart drips blood every time a little child is run over by a motorist. He sheds tears in the bathroom, or other secret places, because Chinese babies are being massacred in Hankow or Canton. He agonizes because of the atrocities in Spain. He shudders at the thought of German concentration camps. He cries out to God in crowded places because he sees the inevitability of a war which will kill the women and children first and have detrimental results upon all things of art and beauty. I'm telling you, Judy. He's a sentimentalist. He's an idealist. In his heart is a divine despair which will make marriage with him very difficult and probably unhappy. Don't marry a man, Judy, with morbid mind and sensitive soul—a moody Englishman with a strain of mysticism. You're rushing towards a tragedy. These idealists in private life are utterly selfish and quite intolerable. They forget to pass the salt. They sit silent with their unfortunate wives. They fail to earn any money because of their lovely and impossible ideals. They expect to be kept because they're so very noble and so very spiritual."

Robin laughed a good deal at these remarks.

"My dear Vera," he said, "I can almost forgive you for your vicious nature because I will say you have a wit. That was rather good stuff. If I thought it was true I would go and hang myself."

Judy had enjoyed this passage of arms though now and again perturbed by the sight of naked swords.

"It's all very well, Vera," she said, "but I can't pass all that without protest. Why do you hate idealism so much? Isn't it the only thing that's going to save us?"

"Child," said Lady Munstead, as though she were very, very old, "I've met some of the idealists. I read my morning paper. This world is in an awful mess and we're all going to be blown to bits because of the idealists. They imposed sanctions on Italy so that now Mussolini has flung himself into the rat-trap of the Axis. They insisted on collective security when it was a broken reed. The idealists in England are clamouring for war with Germany. The idealists in Germany are persecuting Jews in the sacred name of race purity and building bombing aeroplanes at great speed to destroy civilization because they believe in the beautiful ideal of blood, soil and something else which I forget. Hitler is an idealist. Stalin is an idealist. Duff Cooper is an idealist. I'm told even that President Roosevelt is an idealist, though eleven million of his fellow countrymen are workless, and business is at a standstill because of his ideals. No, my sweet Judy, let us kill the idealists and get back to reality and common sense."

"You're talking about fanatics, not idealists," said Judy. "I'm an American. I believe in idealism. I believe in President Roosevelt."

"She believes in President Roosevelt, Robin," said Vera, turning to him incredulously. "She may even believe in Mr. Chamberlain!"

"I do," said Judy. "He saved the world from war once. I have an idea he's going to do it again."

"If I don't laugh I shall cry," said Vera. "Robin, my darling, how's that beastly picture getting on?"

"It's a giddy masterpiece," said Robin. "Future ages will gaze at it and say, 'That woman must have been a pretty slut. Regard the devilry in her eyes. Look at that cruel mouth! How many hearts did she break? And how many husbands did she murder, by tiny drops of poison in daily doses whilst she smoothed their pillows and smiled into their glazing eyes?'"

"Well, you shan't destroy this one," said Vera. "No money, Robin, until I have it under lock and key."

Robin Bramley had once destroyed a portrait of Lady Munstead done by his brush. He had slashed it across the face with a palette-knife.

But she had a kind heart! Dropping all nonsense one day she spoke to Robin and Judy about their coming marriage.

"Where are you going, darlings, for a honeymoon?" she asked.

"Battersea Park," said Robin. "The poor man's Paradise. An occasional bus ride perhaps to Hampton Court. Why do you ask?"

"Jack and I are going up to Scotland," said Vera. "Why not stay a few weeks at our place in Sussex? We're leaving the servants, and I'll leave my blessing on the dressing-table and a few tears in a scent-bottle."

"Is that a serious offer?" asked Robin.

It was quite serious. She was keen on it.

"It will be a favour to me," she told them. "You'll be able to take the dogs for a walk now and then and give the horses some exercise, poor dears."

"Will I call it a fair offer?" said Robin. "Done with you, woman. We will be your caretakers."

"Of course," said Vera, "there's one reservation. If war comes you'll have to clear out. I've promised to billet forty brats from the East End, and they'll arrive with tickets tied round their beastly little necks in charge of an elementary school-teacher of repulsive aspect."

"By gum!" said Robin. "That would be a funny ending to a honeymoon!"

He laughed at one of life's little ironies.

"Vera," he said, "I've often abused you, and you're a dangerous woman, but Judy and I forgive you everything. You're playing the fairy godmother with extraordinary talent and great charm. God bless you, Vera."

"Give me a parting kiss, Robin," she said, presenting her lovely cheek. "You know you were my first lover, and will always be part of my dead self."

Judy didn't mind very much.

XXIV

THEY were married in Chelsea Old Church. Bramley had wanted a very quiet wedding, but as most weddings do, unless at a registry office in a back street, it had developed into a social affair. That was partly the fault of Mrs. Barton, who said that she disliked the idea of a hole-and-corner ceremony.

"After all," she remarked, "we're not ashamed of it, Judy, and I'd like to see a bit about it in the English and American Press. Our friends in Massachusetts will like to read it."

In spite of Judy's protests, loyal to Robin's wishes for quietude and privacy, she had sent invitations to some of her American friends in London, including young Bryan Feversham of the American Embassy and Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Speed of John's London office. It was a great pity that John himself was unable to get back from Prague, whence he wrote a letter of darkest gloom after sending his love and blessings to Judy and Robin.

Mrs. Barton had arranged a reception at the house in St. Leonard's Terrace before the newly married couple departed for their honeymoon in an old Sussex manor house. Robin's best man was Viscount Ede, who was lending him a second-hand car from his garage—a Rolls-Royce of ancient type which, he said, they might leave in a ditch after reaching their destination as he couldn't get a bid for it owing to the new tax on horse-power.

Outside Chelsea Old Church a little crowd gathered to see the arrival of the bride and bridegroom. Several nurses wheeled their perambulators from Burton Court for this event. They knew the Americans in St. Leonard's

Terrace who had made friends with their babies and small children. Two old Chelsea pensioners had taken their morning walk as far as this, and with the deathless romance of old soldiers lingered on to see the wedding as far as it could be seen from the railings outside the church. A butcher-boy, regardless of his morning deliveries, propped his bicycle against the kerb and confided to a nursemaid of his acquaintance that he liked a good wedding, though it looked as though this were going to be a second-class affair. He nudged the aforesaid nursemaid as one of the wedding guests arrived, and spoke excitedly :

"Golly ! There's old Sarah of Susan Street Mews. She 'ad 'er portrait 'ung in a gallery last year. There was a photo of it in the picture papers."

She was one of Robin Bramley's models and a charwoman by profession, somewhat addicted to gin and bawdy in her talk, but otherwise a perfect lady, said Robin, and very warm-hearted. Robin had introduced her to Judy some time back as the 'Duchess of Knightsbridge'.

To the church also came some Breton boys with strings of onions round their necks, who grinned with their black eyes and showed their very white teeth as the wedding guests arrived. Robin had painted a masterpiece of one of these boys and stood treat to a group of them.

Among those who stood beyond the railings was an organ-grinder in a bowler hat made by Locke, now somewhat the worse for sun and rain, and a lounge suit of Robin's cut in Cork Street, but weatherbeaten and baggy at the knees. He started playing his piano-organ. It played an American song called 'I Saw Stars'.

"Now then," said a policeman, who had strolled up to keep an eye on things. "Move on there ! We don't want that kind of thing in this 'ere place, at this 'ere time."

"That's where you're mistook," said the organ-grinder. "I'm a part of the wedding. I'm 'ere by special request of the bridegroom, who's a friend of mine in Susan Street Mews. 'E's always very 'umorous. 'E's thrown many a

sixpence at me from his window-boxes. 'E's a hartist, and a gen'leman."

The humorous gentleman from Susan Street Mews had other friends who rallied up to see him married. There were two garage hands able to attend because they worked on the night shift, and a flower-woman from Sloane Square who had a bouquet for the bride. Among the guests were the Earl and Countess of Stanfield; Miss Muriel Golightly and Miss Beatrice Jenks, artists' models and mannequins; Viscount Ede and Lady Marjorie Ede; Joe Blinker, the light-weight pugilist, friend of the bridegroom, and Mrs. Betty Blinker; Mr. and Mrs. Carraway, who sold artists' materials in the Kings Road and were very generous in allowing credit to artist gentlemen down on their luck; Lieutenant-Commander Speedwell with two naval lieutenants in blue serge suits; Peter Langdon, the novelist, and Katherine Langdon; the Vice-President of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters; and a consumptive but talented artist in coloured chalks who did pictures on the pavement at Hyde Park Corner. Long before the arrival of the bride the church was filled with attractive-looking women in the thirties or forties who had known Robin Bramley when his sense of humour was still young and when he had walked down Mayfair as though he owned the world.

"Somebody's let me down!" exclaimed that distinguished portrait painter when he was driven to the church by his cousin Ede in a two-seater sports car. "I seem to see a mob."

"It was announced in the *Evening News*," said his cousin Ede. "You'll have to face a battery of cameras, old boy. Life nowadays is conducted entirely for the B.B.C., the newsreel and the picture papers. No privacy; can't call your life your own."

"Frank," said Robin nervously, "I'd rather face a firing squad. I'm a shy man though they think I'm brazen."

"Pull yourself together, old boy," said his cousin. "You'll feel all right if you recite 'Three Blind Mice'

several times. You know! 'They all ran after the farmer's wife'. I used to do it when I was in the Brigade of Guards. I found it very helpful at trying moments. It keeps one steady."

Robin was in a lounge suit of blue flannel with a thin white stripe. He had utterly refused to be married in a top hat, much to the disappointment of Mrs. Barton, who thought he was not living up to the best English tradition.

"There 'e is!" shouted the butcher's boy, as Robin got out of his cousin's car. "I've served 'im many a time with chump chops."

"Oh Gord!" cried Sarah, 'Duchess of Knightsbridge'. "It makes me feel down'hearted. And 'im so 'umorous, poor dear!"

"Hullo, Sarah, old dear!" cried Robin. "Well, it's a treat to see you."

She flung her arms about him.

"Take it easy, dear," she said. "You can always chuck 'er if she ain't no good to you. Don't feel 'angdog about it. When I married my Bill——"

Robin released himself to shake hands with the onion boys, pulling their ears and tweaking their noses and talking to them in excellent French to their great delight. He had a word for the organ-grinder, and another for his friend the pavement artist.

"By the Lord Harry!" he said, not without emotion. "I didn't know I had such a lot of friends. It's worth getting married to find that out."

"Sorry, old boy," said Viscount Ede, "but as best man I must ask you to move into the church."

Robin moved into the church where there was a stir at his coming. His eyes, in which there seemed to lurk a secret jest, roved over the benches where so many beautiful ladies were sitting. There was, he noticed, Kitty Beauchamp. They had played together as a small boy and girl in Kensington Gardens. She had danced with him when he

wore tails for the first time. And there was Pearl Lovelace, who used to eat strawberries and cream with him on Speech Day at Winchester. He had had a romantic love for her as a boy of sixteen. Now she was Mrs. Something—he couldn't remember—and the mother of four babes. And there was Lydia Merivale who had driven a lorry in the General Strike of 1926 when he had been conductor on an omnibus for four days or so. They had eaten sausages together in one of the canteens and he had been attracted by her Joan-of-Arc look. They had gone about a bit after that, but she liked the best places and he couldn't afford them. And there was that smiling wood-nymph Jenifer Brand, now the wife of the fellow on the B.B.C. She was waggling a little white glove at him from one of the pews.

"I say, old boy," whispered his cousin Ede. "Eyes front. Here comes the bride."

Judy came with eyes so bright that they looked like stars.

Robin was only able to whisper to her when he took her hand.

"It's a great joke, isn't it?" he said.

XXV

THE hall porters of hotels in Prague, Vienna, Berlin and Rome, who before the war of 1914-18, or afterwards, had learnt remarkably good English, with the linguistic talent of their tribe, spelt out the words of many wireless messages and cablegrams handed to them by a tall young American, who looked annoyed about something.

The messages themselves conveyed no hint of annoyance. They were romantic and amorous. They touched the hearts of the hall porters in Prague, Vienna, Berlin and Rome, who in their time, before settling down as respectable family men, had known the pangs of love. It was pleasant, they thought, that in a world full of trouble, and undoubtedly preparing for another war, this good-looking young man should send words of love and devotion, at considerable cost, to a lady, doubtless beautiful, as far away as New York. The lady's name was Anne Ede.

Our friend John Barton, who dispatched these cables, hated his lonely pilgrimage in search of the 'lowdown' below the thin crust of European peace. He was a disappointed man, but he was also a good newspaper man with the reporter's instinct in his blood, so that he decided, very wisely and doggedly, to make the best of a bad business and get on with his job. It was a job which took him into the danger zones of the political battlefield in Europe, and into the corridors of fear, rumour and political agitation. In Prague he was reported to Herr Himmler's Black Guards, who were busy in Germany's new Protectorate, and one evening he received a visit from two German officers of that force who told him very politely, but quite firmly, that he must leave the city within twenty-four hours.

"Is there anything to hide?" asked John Barton. "Don't you want the world to know what's happening here?"

The taller of Herr Himmler's officers smiled at this question.

"We're not at all ashamed of what is happening here," he answered, in excellent English. "It's all going according to plan. But at the present time we discourage English journalists and especially perhaps American journalists, who are apt to give an unfriendly bias to their reports of the facts. Doubtless you understand without further explanation."

"Perfectly," said John. "But as it happens I've found out all I want to know, and I shall be pleased to leave this city where no one can breathe freely, and where everyone looks over his shoulder before he speaks. I find it depressing."

A slightly sinister look came into the eyes of Herr Himmler's officer.

"You might find it more depressing," he said, "if you stayed any longer. You will go on the train which leaves this city at eleven o'clock tomorrow night. That is understood?"

"I get you," said John.

He had seen enough and heard enough to know that there was enough bitterness in Prague to spoil any sweetness of life for Czechs or Jews. They did not welcome this German 'protection' with gratitude and enthusiasm. The crowds in the streets looked sullen and dejected. There was no laughter in the coffee-shops or taverns under the shadow of the Radczany—that old fortress palace on a hill where German officers were in control. There was hatred and despair in the hearts of this people, as John heard from a man—a Czech journalist—who had talked to him for hours one night in a small flat to which he had invited some of his friends to meet this American observer.

"We have been betrayed by the world," he said. "England betrayed us. France betrayed us. Our own

leaders betrayed us. But one day we shall regain our liberties, and that day is when Germany plunges into war at the bidding of that maniac who controls her destiny and leads her to destruction. Does he think the Czechs will fight for him then? Does he count on our love and loyalty?"

He laughed harshly, and there was a flame in his eyes.

One of the other men spoke more quietly.

"We have submitted outwardly, but not in our souls. Our Czech workmen are giving trouble to our new 'Protectors' who wish to use their skill and industry. They do not work very hard, I assure you! Things go wrong with the machines. There is a passive resistance."

"We can do nothing," said another man. "They have their spies everywhere. The concentration camps are crowded with prisoners."

Another man spoke. He was dark-eyed and dark-skinned with the face of a scholar and an intellectual.

"I am a Jew. There is no hope for us. Every day there are many suicides."

"We should have fought last September," said the man who had denounced England and France. "We should have refused to accept that Munich betrayal when our fate was decided by Chamberlain and Daladier, who handed us over without allowing our leaders to come to the conference table or say one word on our behalf."

"No," said the Jew. "Let us face facts. In any case we should have been destroyed. How could we defend this State when the Sudeten Germans were against us, when the Hungarians were ready to break away? Prague would have been a rubble heap of dust and ashes."

"England wasn't ready," said another man. "France was weak. Perhaps in the long run it was better not to fight at that time. Chamberlain could not save us. Let us be fair. It was Benes who failed to avert calamity by his delays in every form. He was very obstinate."

"Russia was another who betrayed us," said the man who had invited John Barton to his flat. "Russia had

promised us all things and did nothing when the time came. The hopes of our Communists were an illusion. Russia has gone back to its old Imperialism."

"I disagree," said the Jew. "Russia will wait until Europe lies bleeding, starving and diseased. Then all Europe will accept the Marxian faith proclaimed by our Slav brothers."

"We shall see terrible things," said one of the men. "We shall have to wade through blood and agony before we regain our freedom. We shall have to endure this serfdom until its iron is burnt into our souls. Revolt will be trampled down by German troops who will not be merciful in time of war—a war which they are losing. We shall be massacred."

"God has abandoned us," said one of the Czechs. "It is perhaps our fault."

"The Czech spirit," said John's host, "will never be killed. Not even the Germans can kill the spirit of our people. We shall wait. We shall work underground. And we have not long to wait. Germany will collapse. It is already rotten. It is an *Ersatz* State. Her steel is rotten. Her railways are dilapidated. Everything in Germany is shoddy and falls to bits when it is used. And one day Hitler will die. Then we shall see something."

He stared across his room as though seeing strange and terrible things which might be good for Czechs.

One man gave a groan. It was the intellectual-looking Jew.

"My people are suffering most," he said. "Whatever happens, I see no hope for them. Our safety depends upon the tolerance of civilized minds. The civilized mind no longer exists. The lamps have gone out. Intelligence has fled. It is Cain, the murderer, who kills his brother man and rules the nations of mankind. There is no hope."

John Barton was glad to leave this room in which dwelt bitterness and hopelessness. He was glad to leave Prague.

It was not so tragic in Vienna, though he found discontent and disillusion. Outwardly things had improved. There were fewer signs of misery in the working quarters. Unemployment was not so widespread, and there was a living wage for most men who could work, though only just a living wage. Austrians were going into Germany in considerable numbers for factory work and agriculture. Life seemed to go on as it had been before the *Anschluss*, in spite of Nazi officials in the Hofburg and secret police in many places. The crowds along the Kärntnerstrasse looked in fairly good shape, though shabby for the most part. The restaurants were fairly full. Orchestras played the old Viennese music, as though life were still gay. Spring flowers made a fine show in the Graben. Along the Ring there was a certain amount of motor traffic, though nothing like that of Paris and London, and the spring sunshine glinted on the roofs of palaces and universities and played among the children in the pleasure gardens. Here stood untouched the splendour and beauty of an Imperial city, which had once been the rendezvous of fashion and luxury and wealth. But it was an empty shell. There were few foreign visitors in the hotels, as their staffs complained to John Barton, whom they were quick to recognize as an American.

"It's nice to see you," they told him. "We have only Germans, who cannot spend any money. The English do not come any more because they are afraid of a war next week or the week afterwards."

"How do you like being a German province?" asked John of the English-speaking waiter who brought up his breakfast.

The man hesitated, and then closed the door.

"It was, perhaps, inevitable," he said. "Austria could not live alone. But the Germans make it very difficult. Too much discipline. Too much ordering about. Too much interference with our Austrian ways and habits. The people earn wages, but they have to work long hours.

There is no ease of life as there used to be. There is no gaiety. There is no leisure. We Austrians called ourselves 'Germans'—part of the Germanic race—but we are very different. We are lazy. We like to be lazy, because that is the pleasure of life. We dislike discipline, because to us discipline is death. We liked to go to the coffee-shops half-way through the morning to read the papers and discuss politics or private affairs. That is finished. It is no use going to a coffee-house. There is no coffee! It is no use talking politics, there are no politics, but only obedience to the will of Hitler. There is no more Austria. There is no more Vienna. We are *gleichgeschaltet*—that is to say, made into one pattern from the same mould which is made in Germany. I regret it."

There were others who regretted the *Anschluss* with Germany—some of the aristocrats of the old régime, now shabby-genteel; and business men in Vienna who were under German regulations; and some of the intellectuals, who found that their intellect was highly dangerous if it led them to disagree with the Nazi creed of German foreign policy, or German views on art, literature, science and the humanities.

John Barton met a few of these men, one of whom was an Austrian novelist, whose books had been translated into English.

"My books," he told John, "are on Himmler's black list. His officials seem to have read and disliked them because they express pacifist ideals. I am, of course, a pacifist, being a little civilized and a little educated."

"What are you going to do?" asked John, not without sympathy, though he was not a complete pacifist, and in a moment of exasperation not long ago had confessed that he was getting 'bloody-minded', which was untrue to his temperament and ideals.

"I shall have to become a refugee," said his Austrian friend, with a brave attempt at laughter. "I shall have to join those poor Jews and Czechs and Sudeten democrats

and Italian liberals and Spanish republicans and others who wander about the world in search of sanctuary and the sweet breath of liberty. But the gates are closing, even in England, even in the United States. There are too many of us knocking at the door."

"I should like to be of help," said John. "I might pull a string or two."

He made another friend in life by pulling a string which opened a little door in the high barriers through which this Austrian slipped, with the Statue of Liberty as his far goal.

At the American Consulate in Vienna John found a friend of his who looked thin and worn.

"This job," he said, "is getting me down. It's hard work and it's heart-breaking. Take a look through that door."

John looked through a door which his friend opened for a moment. It led into a large room crowded with men and women, all sitting or standing with a kind of desperate patience.

His friend shut the door again.

"Would-be refugees!" he said. "Mostly Jews, of course, but many others. Doctors, lawyers, professors, shop-keepers, merchants, school-teachers, clinical assistants, artists, musicians, clerks, engineers, architects and what not. Some of them used to be rich. Some of them used to be well-to-do. Now they face utter ruin and starvation without a hope, except the thin chance of escape to some other land. Lots of them want to go to Palestine, but England is getting tired of having her soldiers sniped and bombed by Arab patriots. England made one promise to the Arabs and another to the Jews. Hence the conflict. Meanwhile, Vienna is a suicide club."

John Barton had a dreadful experience of that tragic way of escape, which will leave its mark upon his mind for life. He was hurrying past the Stefankirche—that dream of beauty in stone—that wonderwork of the mediaeval mason—that shrine of faith and worship in which there is

a call to pity and human charity in the spirit of Christ. He was hurrying to send off another cable to Anne Ede, just to tell her that he was still alive and still in love. Suddenly, out of a blue sky, something fell heavily into the street a few yards away from him. People started shrieking. The thing that had fallen out of the blue sky was the body of a young girl, younger than Anne Ede. She had flung herself from the high spire of St. Stephen's Cathedral.

"*Ach, lieber Gott!*" cried a woman, gazing at this mutilated body. "*Noch eine Jüdin!*"

Another young Jewess had climbed high for this way of death.

John felt faint and sick for some time after that. He was glad to leave Vienna where once there had been laughter and love-making in the sunshine of life, and the music of light hearts according to the scenario writers in Hollywood, who were apt to exaggerate their theme songs.

In Berlin he had friends who were glad to see him again. Among them was Frau von Altendorf, the sister of Katherine Langdon, who had stayed with her German husband and her daughter Anna—a hundred per cent Nazi that young woman—at the Langdons' house in London. He was, he thought, lucky to find Margaret von Altendorf alone in her drawing-room when he called upon her. As an Englishwoman married to a German she could see things from both sides.

The conversation at first was about her English relatives. She had had to write and tell them not to discuss politics in their letters or to expect any political references in hers.

"All foreign letters are now censored," she told John. "One has to be careful."

She laughed when John said that Peter Langdon was still worrying about the international situation.

"I'm afraid there's a lot to worry about," she confessed. "My husband is not very happy about things. He thinks

Mr. Chamberlain has made a mistake—perhaps a fatal mistake—in his policy of encirclement.”

“It’s not a hostile encirclement,” said John, putting the English point of view as he had heard it so often from Peter Langdon, this lady’s brother-in-law. “It’s a Peace Front against any further German aggression.”

“They don’t see it like that here,” said Frau von Altendorf. “They think Mr. Chamberlain must have gone a little mad in making those pacts with Poland and Rumania and Greece and Russia. My German friends think that in any case England cannot defend Poland, and still less Rumania, except by the help of Russia which would open the floodgates to world Communism. They can’t forgive England for that. They have always regarded themselves as the bulwark against Bolshevism.”

“England can’t forgive Hitler for breaking his pledges over Czechoslovakia,” said John. “They feel pretty mad about it. It let down Mr. Chamberlain and it smashed his policy of appeasement.”

“Yes,” said Margaret von Altendorf. “My husband thinks Hitler made a great mistake. I confess I was horrified, although I feel half German. But it doesn’t horrify my daughter Anna, or my son Hans! They think Hitler was right to smudge out a wasps’ nest. And they don’t see why England should interfere in Central Europe when she has so many spheres of influence in the world.”

“England is afraid of losing them,” said John. “She has reason to be afraid with this Tokio-Berlin-Rome Axis. Unless Germany is checked England will find herself challenged from the Pacific to the Mediterranean.”

“The Poles are very unreliable,” said this lady. “Now they’ve been promised England’s help they may be very hot-headed. England has put into their hands the key of peace or war. Are they quite equal to that responsibility? And, after all, Danzig is German, and the Polish Corridor has always been an absurdity.”

There had been a time when John’s study of the Euro-

pean map had led him to believe that the Polish Corridor was an absurdity and one of the bad deeds of the Peacemakers of Versailles.

"One can't make reasonable arrangements with unreasonable people," he answered. "Hitler is an unreasonable man. He uses every concession as a stepping-stone to fresh demands. Therefore there won't be any more concessions. England has drawn the line. If he goes a hair's breadth beyond that there'll be war."

Katherine Langdon's sister looked distressed.

"Hans is of military age," she said. "If there's a war he may have to fight against his English cousins. If there's a war again between Germany and England I shall break my heart. I shall die. I couldn't bear it. I would rather be dead."

She spoke suddenly, in a passion of despair.

"It's too frightful! The German people still want to be friends with the English. There's no hatred yet, in spite of all the propaganda. In every part of Germany they are still very kind to any English visitors who come. They go out of their way to be kind. But I'm afraid it may change just as it's changing in England. German friends of mine who have been in London lately tell me that people are cold to them. And the English newspapers preach only hatred and ill-will. They are cultivating a war mentality. I see it creeping up again like a grisly spectre out of its grave where we thought it was buried. All the appeals to suspicion, all the lies!"

She broke down and wept, but hurriedly dried her eyes and struggled for composure when a girl's voice came singing down the passage.

"There's Anna!" she said, in a low voice. "We mustn't talk like this before Anna."

Anna burst into the room like a young leopardess, and she was abashed for just a second on finding John Barton there. After that moment of shyness she put on her best manners with great ease.

"How do you do, Mr. Barton? How nice to see you in Berlin again!"

"You're looking fine," he told her, smiling at this tall, strongly built lass with the blue eyes and straw-coloured hair of Nordic type, pleasing to the heart of Hitler the Austrian.

"I feel fine," she admitted. "How is England? How is my cousin Paul, who always quarrels with me?"

"He has joined the British Air Force," said John.

Anna looked surprised and amused.

"Oh, well, perhaps it will make a man of him! But why is England making all these preparations for war? Why are all the English getting into a panic every weekend?"

"I haven't observed signs of panic," said John, feeling loyal to England. "But they have an idea that Germany is asking for war, and they've made up their minds to be ready and strong."

Anna laughed with complete incredulity.

"They've got it all wrong, as usual! It's all those lies in the English newspapers. So long as England doesn't interfere with German affairs, there is no reason to be afraid of war. In Germany we want peace. Our Führer wants peace. You will find no war scare from one end of Germany to the other. We are all perfectly tranquil."

"That's because you don't know what's going on," said John. "You're told nothing, and you know nothing, except what Dr. Goebbels asks you to believe."

"We know our Führer!" cried Anna. "We know that what he does is always right. We are, of course, strong enough to resist this ridiculous policy of encirclement. We have no fear."

"Fine!" said John. "That's a very happy state of mind, Miss Anna."

"Anna, my dear," said her mother nervously, "ask the *madchen* to bring in tea."

John talked with other people in Berlin, who were not

quite so sure as Anna of Germany's strength and Hitler's infallible wisdom. So far from telling him that they had no fear, they said: "We are afraid. We are afraid that Hitler may have taken the wrong road; we are raising up many enemies against us. We see only darkness ahead. We do not know where the ambitions of our leaders will lead. We thought the Sudeten land was to be the end. But it seems to be only a beginning. What are all these troop movements? Why are millions of men under arms while there is not enough labour to till the fields? What do we want with those Czechs? They are only a drain on us, like the Sudetens and the Austrians. There is less to eat in Berlin. Our stocks of raw material are growing less, and the quality of our manufactures worse. We have no gold reserves. We have no margin in our food supplies. If there's a war we shall be on short rations before a week has passed. We regret England's policy of encirclement. It may force on this war, which we regard with horror and fear. The world is going mad again. There is no sanity. It is perhaps the twilight of civilization before the night."

John heard these words, and others like them, in quiet rooms in Berlin, where no servants were present. He was glad to leave Berlin.

XXVI

HE went to Rome. It is always pleasant in Rome in the month of May. It would have been pleasanter for John Barton if Anne Ede had been with him, as once she was when he had played a game of being in love with her and had thought she might be serious. He was haunted by memories of that time when he sat in the Pincio Gardens drinking a *capuccino* and watching the cavalcade along the tanned track, and the pretty women talking scandal under orange-coloured parasols while they sipped little liquids of golden hue. He thought of Anne again when for the sake of remembrance he took tea at Valadier's and lunch at the Ulpia.

It was when he was lunching at the Ulpia that he caught the gaze of an Italian lady with black hair looped over her ears. She seemed to recognize him from some distant past, and he knew her at a glance. It was the Contessa Massaccio who had flirted with him now and then and talked great nonsense to him merrily.

She smiled and raised a little finger in greeting and he went over to her table where she sat with another lady of her own age and style.

"At first I didn't believe it was you," she said. "You have grown more handsome and more grave. You look like an American Senator or even the President of the United States."

"I feel like that, Contessa," said John. "It's a most unpleasant feeling."

"Take coffee with us," she suggested amiably. "My friend here, Margarita, is very tired of hearing my chatter. Tell us about American gunmen or the beauties of Hollywood and their frequent love-affairs."

"I'm afraid my knowledge is not up to date," said John, taking his seat at their table. "I haven't been to America for quite a time."

"Where then have you been?" asked the Contessa. "Paris?"

"London," said John. "Not a bad place. I have a little paradise there."

"*Non è possibile!*" cried the Contessa, incredulously. "It is not possible to make a paradise in a madhouse!"

John raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"That is your view of it?"

"The English have gone mad," announced the lady. "I am sorry about it because I used to like them. Englishmen make love more nicely than Italians. They are shy and a little chivalrous, even when they are very immoral. It is a pity they have all gone mad."

"I failed to observe it," said John. "In what way do you mean, especially?"

"In every way," answered the Contessa. "Don't you agree, Margarita? You don't think I exaggerate?"

"Perhaps only a little," answered the girl, who bore a name famous in Italian history, as she looked at John with the smile of a Renaissance lady in the Portrait Gallery of the Uffizi.

"Did I not tell you when you were last here?" said the Contessa. "I remember a little dinner-party when I drank too much wine, and when I told you that the English had gone mad because they believed in Sanctions and the League of Nations, and with great deliberation and obstinacy made enemies of their best friends. I seem to remember."

John seemed to remember.

"Since then——" he said.

"Since then," said the Contessa, "it is even more tragic with those poor mad English. They rush towards a war with Germany. They give their word of honour to defend Poland, which cannot be defended. They threaten to make a world war if Hitler seizes Danzig, which is, after all, a

German city, and which he will seize. They try to make an alliance with Russia, which is the enemy of British Imperialism and which is ready to make a bargain with Hitler. Certainly then they have gone mad! Mr. Chamberlain with his old umbrella . . .”

John did not want to argue with this little lady. He didn't want to talk international politics with her. But she insisted upon his answer.

“Mr. Chamberlain,” he said, “is less of a madman than anyone I can think of. I think he has more sanity and wisdom than Herr Hitler or, shall I say—Mr. Smith?”

Mr. Smith was the name used in public places among certain circles for a very important person.

The Contessa glanced over her shoulder and lowered her voice.

“They, too, are mad!” she said, putting a finger to her lips and looking into John's eyes with a warning smile.

“Tell me,” said John good-humouredly, “are there any sane people left around this world?”

“Only little me and big you,” she told him. “And perhaps Margarita. We are very lonely, are we not? We should keep close to each other. Will you dine with me this evening? I will tell you strange things—very secret—which you will publish no doubt in the American newspapers. I will tell you what the people of Italy are thinking about, which is not printed in Italian newspapers. I will give you the only key to European peace. You may use it to save twenty million lives.”

“Well, that's a pleasant invitation,” John admitted. “If I could get that key I might get beatified by the Pope of Rome and have a statue put up to me in my home town. Shall we be alone? Or do I have a chaperone?”

The Contessa Massaccio was much amused by that inquiry.

“Your virtue,” she told him, “is entirely safe. Margarita is staying with me and will be on guard.”

That evening, after a pleasant dinner with the two

ladies in an apartment with a painted ceiling and Italian furniture of the renaissance style, John raised the question of the key to peace. She didn't explain her meaning for some little time. She talked a good deal about Germany and Count Ciano, who was Il Duce's son-in-law, in very close touch with Herr von Ribbentrop.

Il Duce, she said, was relaxing his interest a little in foreign policy. He seemed to be getting a little tired. He was interesting himself in other ways—with a new lady friend.

"I think perhaps you are talking dangerously," said her friend Margarita. "In Italy walls have ears."

"That is true, darling," said the Contessa. "We will whisper a little."

John found it pleasant and amusing to listen to a whispered conversation in an Italian room where there was only the light of four candles, except for the glow in an Italian sky beyond the windows, still darkly blue long after sunset.

"I will tell you," she whispered. "We Italians do not want to be dragged into a European war tied to a German chariot. There is in Italy a great hatred for the Axis. There is in Italy a great fear of war with England. Intelligent people in Italy, of whom I am one, as you know, think that great mistakes have been made and that there is not much time to undo them."

"I listen," said John. "Do we still go on whispering?"

She raised her voice faintly. "Our Duce is a man who believes in the necessity of European peace. He saved the peace in the September crisis of last year—you remember? He is ready again to throw his weight on the side of peace in the next crisis which is coming soon, perhaps in the autumn of this year. But beyond the Brenner are eighty million people under the leadership of a ruthless man. Italy has to play her cards carefully. You understand?"

"I understand," said John. "I get that all right. But you said something about the key to peace."

"I will make you a present of it," she told him. "It is

for England and France to make a friendly compact with Mr. Smith, quite privately of course. No newspaper publicity. No screaming over the radio. A nice little private compact which offers Italy something worth while—the Jibuti railway, for instance, a few islands in the Mediterranean, some more territory in Central Africa, a little loan of forty million pounds or so from the English banks, and a pledge not to bombard Italian cities in return for Italy's promise to be neutral in any war which Germany may make. Is it not worth while for England and France? Would it not prevent Germany from making that war? Would it not liberate many French troops? I tell you these things as an Italian woman who hears many whispers in Rome from friends behind the scenes. I tell you these things because I hate the Germans, as all Italians hate them, because of their contempt for us, and because they have put chains round our necks."

"That's all very interesting," said John thoughtfully. "But I don't happen to control the foreign policy of England or France."

"You have friends in both countries," said the Contessa. "You know those who pull the strings."

It was an interesting evening.

He met other people in Rome who were not in love with the Berlin-Rome Axis. Some of them were Italians who looked over their shoulders when they talked, with that quick look of caution which in Germany is called "*Das Deutsches Blick*", and in other capitals of Europe is now to be observed in taverns and coffee-houses and hotel smoking-rooms, and even in private apartments, because free speech has become very dangerous over wide regions of Europe where once was liberty.

"We know," said some of these Italians, "that Hitler is gambling with fate for great stakes, and using Italy as one of his counters. We do not like the idea of that game of chance. Mussolini has also the gambler's instinct, but he has a good brain and he does not wish a European war."

"Your newspapers," said John, "don't seem to reflect that beautiful love of peace. Your Signor Gayda is very strong on the Axis and Italian claims to other people's property. It didn't show much care for the peace of Europe when your Duce occupied Albania on a Sunday morning not long ago."

They did not seem to think much of Signor Gayda. They had a pronounced contempt for their Italian Press, as well as for all journalists and newspaper men in the propaganda machine of other countries.

"It is the black plague of civilization," said one of them. "It is the poison gas of the soul—this modern press—controlled by dictators and politicians."

There was an Englishman in Rome to whom John paid a visit one evening in his apartment looking over a great panorama of Rome from a tall house in the Trinità dei Monti. It was an elderly diplomat named Henry Merivale who had been friendly with John before, and now welcomed him with great kindness. He was a friend of David Ede and his sister Anne, and his first words were warm congratulations to John on the announcement of his engagement to a beautiful lady.

"I read it in *The Times*," he said. "It gave me real pleasure. When are you going to get married?"

John laughed rather ruefully.

"Anne eludes me," he said. "Perhaps it's written in the book that I shall always be chasing her down labyrinthine ways. I've been following her about Europe as a passionate pilgrim, but every time I catch up with her some scurvy trick of fate tears us apart. I'm losing confidence."

He told the story of his missing the boat which carried Anne to the United States.

"I believe I've a hoodoo on me," he confessed. "It's an evil spell cast upon me by foul Furies. Perhaps God doesn't love newspaper men."

Henry Merivale did not love newspaper men, but he

concealed this prejudice from an American reporter for whom he had a liking and respect.

It was inevitable that they should talk about the world situation. Merivale was pessimistic.

"Our diplomacy," he said, "has been disastrous. When we imposed sanctions on Italy during the Abyssinian war without the strength to carry them out effectively—knowing that France had already ratted—we forced Mussolini into the German camp. So fell Austria, and after that the Czechs were doomed. Step by step we have reached this dreadful state of things, which I fear must end in the great explosion."

John did not reveal his private conversation with a certain contessa, but based a question on it.

"Is there still time to do a deal with Il Duce?"

Henry Merivale paused for a moment before he answered.

"Only at a heavy price. It might be worth it to save a general conflagration, which can only end in utter ruin for everybody—the downfall of European civilization and its Christian culture."

He went to his window high up in the tall building above the steps of the Trinità dei Monti. John moved to his side and looked down upon Rome under the dark dome of a Roman night. The Eternal City was sleeping on its seven hills. Its palaces and churches and ancient ruins stood in a milky radiance of moonlight, with tall cypresses on the distant hills like black spearheads in the star-strewn sky.

"The Barbarians are stirring in their forests," said Merivale. "The pagan world is moving towards the Rome of St. Peter. Christ will be crucified again. Darkness falls over the Seven Hills."

John was glad to leave Rome, even in this springtime, when it is a city of enchantment. In its blue sky, so deeply blue above the white domes and broken pillars, there was the menace of forked lightning such as Caesar saw before the gods abandoned him. In the Pincio Gardens, where

pretty ladies talked with their *cavalieri* and children played with white-capped nurses, there were whispers of fear. These people were afraid of something lurking behind the curtain of their fate.

He was glad to leave Rome, because every day now would bring him nearer to New York where Anne waited for him. He had arranged to sail from Cherbourg, and Paris was the last city of call before he left Europe and its danger zones.

XXVII

IN Paris he drove straight to an apartment in the rue de la Pompe, where he would have free board and lodging for a few days. It was the apartment of his brother-in-law Louis de Maresquel and of his sister Lucy, once Lucy Barton of Massachusetts.

Lucy flung her arms about him and held him tight, laughing a little and crying a little, for the joy of seeing him again. She had a thousand questions to ask him and he answered most of them with patient good humour. They were questions about Judy—it had broken her heart, she said, not to come over for the wedding, but little Louis-Philippe had been ill with whooping-cough—and about his engagement with Anne Ede, which she thought was wonderful, and about her mother in St. Leonard's Terrace and about Diana Feversham who had been at school with her, and about many other things, such as the visit of the King and Queen of England to Washington and New York, which seemed to have been a great success.

"A smash hit," said John, who had followed the news in foreign cities. "I'm sorry to have missed it. Anne had a great time, and the Queen chatted with her once or twice. She writes very amusing things about the American reaction to Royalty. In fact she's getting a good deal of amusement out of the American adventure, and says she's learning to speak American before I get out."

"Tell me about her," said Lucy. "Does she really love you? Will she make you a good wife, John? Are you sure you haven't made a mistake, my dear? Isn't it always a mistake perhaps to marry someone of a different nationality?"

She had married someone of a different nationality. Perhaps she knew all the difficulties and all the dangers.

John reassured her. Anne, he said, was exquisite, adorable and incomparable. If he'd made a mistake about her, then he had made a mistake about life and all beauty and all that mattered. He had an idea that she loved him, though he couldn't understand why and became disheartened about it from time to time. It seemed too incredible. Anne could have had her choice of England's noblest manhood. Why should she pick on him—an American reporter, who would never be able to put her in an Elizabethan mansion or even a villa on the Riviera, suitable to her style and family distinction?

"Sometimes," said John, "I wake up in a cold sweat at my own good luck. I'm afraid the fairies may snatch it away from me."

Lucy took her mother's view on this subject.

"I don't understand your inferiority complex, John," she said, laughing at him. "If there's any luck on one side or the other, I should say Anne has most of it. A six-foot American educated at Harvard is good enough for a Royal princess."

"That's true," said John humorously. "I'm still a democrat. I don't believe in this caste stuff—except when I tremble in the presence of my future mother-in-law and see the Earl of Stanfield, my future father-in-law, wearing a cocked hat and plumes, with gold braid on his pants, and a blue sash across his scarlet jacket. How's Louis, by the way?"

Louis, it appeared, was more tranquil. Since M. Daladier had become Prime Minister, he had more hope for France.

"France," said Lucy, "has taken a new grip on things. You'd be surprised at the difference. There's a new spirit and a new strength."

Louis confirmed this view after kissing his American brother-in-law on both cheeks, causing him a secret agony

of embarrassment, and patting him on the back with his chin on John's shoulder.

"You come to a regenerated France," he said presently. "Daladier has performed miracles. We no longer fear a revolution from the Left or a *coup d'état* from French Fascists. Daladier has put all that in the basket. He has called to the soul of France—the old loyal and steady soul of our French tradition. The nation has answered him. There is now a *union sacrée* in the face of danger."

"Fine," said John. "I seem to have heard all that before. I heard it from your good-looking cousin, Paul de Brissac."

"All the same," said Louis, after some talk about Paul de Brissac and his sister Virginie—who had stayed behind in Paris and was working in the Broadcasting station of Radio Paris to the great scandal of her family, who thought it lacking in dignity for one of her name—"the people of France, of whom I am one, do not look forward with joy and delight to a war on behalf of the Poles. We do not look forward to any kind of war because we cannot afford to pour out the last blood of the last Frenchmen. After another four years of war, or perhaps ten this time, what will be the state of France? Even now it is difficult to find a Frenchman. When I walk down the rue de Rivoli, on my way from the office, I look at the faces passing me. They are not French faces. They are Jewish faces, Czech faces, Spanish faces, Austrian faces, Polish faces and Slav faces."

"Louis," cried Lucy, "you exaggerate! You are always pessimistic. You see everything through the haze of your own pessimism."

Louis admitted this fact to some extent.

"It is true," he said, "that I am a melancholy fellow. It is perhaps the fault of my family, who have indulged in too much intermarriage. But I am not afraid of saying that I am afraid. My chief fear is for Lucy—*toi, ma bien-aimée*—and my little son, who sometimes makes me want

to weep when I see his little bright eyes looking so happily upon a world which prepares to betray him. For it will be a betrayal of childhood when the first German aeroplanes drop their bombs over Paris. For my little son I am afraid. For my dear American Lucy, who has been so good to me, I am afraid. For myself I have the courage of my family and tradition. For myself, I am not afraid."

"Louis," cried Lucy, much distressed, "if you go on talking like that I shall scream."

He stopped talking like that in the presence of Lucy, but one evening when he was alone with John, while Lucy was giving her little son his bath, he broached a subject which evidently had been much in his mind.

"I wish to consult you," he said, "now that we are alone. You will have another glass of wine? *Mais oui, mais oui!*"

"A matter of business?" asked John, wondering for a moment whether Louis was going to ask for a loan.

"A matter of life and death," said Louis gravely. "Also a matter of honour. It is this. Do you think that Lucy and I should escape with our little son from this death-trap called France—this death-trap called Paris—while there is still time? In a few months, perhaps, the gates will be closed. In a few months, perhaps, Mr. Hitler will declare his war. There will be another crisis. Next time there will be no Munich Agreement. England and France have burnt their boats by these pledges to Poland and other countries. If I were convinced that I could leave my dear France without dishonour, I should be tempted to become a refugee with my family in the United States. I should be glad to hear your views about that."

John Barton found this question difficult to answer. It was the same question which confronted him in St. Leonard's Terrace.

"As long as I'm in America," he said, "there will always be a home for Lucy and her babe."

He thought very hard for a moment, putting his chin

on his clasped hands, with his elbows on the little dining-table, in a room which smelt of French polish and French coffee.

"Why not let me take them back with me?" he asked, after the inward wrestling. "Say, that's a good idea. It's beginning to grow on me."

Louis de Maresquel looked at him doubtfully.

"But what would happen to me? You would leave me behind? *Non, non! Pas possible!*"

A look of horror came into his eyes at the thought of this loneliness, this abandonment.

"For a time," suggested John. "Until we can see things more clearly."

"No, no!" cried Louis. "If Lucy goes I go with her—without Lucy I die."

"Can you quit your job?" asked John.

Louis raised both hands—his delicate, long-fingered hands, carefully manicured.

"In case of necessity," he said, "I walk out. I am not essential to the Ministry. But this question is not immediate. Before the autumn we shall know when this false tranquillity is nearing its end. We shall be warned of the next crisis. I will send you a cable."

John had a few words with Lucy about this idea, and greatly distressed her.

"I couldn't leave Louis," she told him. "He's my other baby, he can't move hand or foot without me. I have to look after his linen. I have to get him off to the office in the morning. He has to have his medicine at meal-times. If I left him in Paris alone he would die."

"He seems to think so," said John drily. "I call it selfishness."

"No," said Lucy, quick in defence of her husband. "He's so sensitive, John. And he's always been waited on since he came into the world. His mother, his aunts, his cousins—they have all waited on him."

"Say, Lucy," said John thoughtfully, "I can't undertake

to get passports for all his family. There's a prejudice in the United States against opening the gates too wide for all the refugees from this war-scared Europe."

Lucy wept, not for joy this time.

"Oh, John," she cried, "I never thought the day might come when I should be a refugee in a panic-stricken world. What are we all coming to?"

"It's a damned queer world," agreed John, trying to comfort her. "I have an idea that it's the end of an epoch and the beginning of another. The world is in a state of flux, as it was when the first tribes went on the move and swarmed like soldier ants from the plains of Asia. It's all very interesting—but rather alarming, I guess."

He was glad to leave Paris, though it was pleasant to sit again outside the Dôme Café and to walk into the Palais Royal and the old streets behind Notre Dame and along the left bank of the Seine, where still students fingered the pages of old books and prints, and fishermen stood waiting for the bite which never came.

He was glad to leave Paris after conversation with his American and English journalist friends, who assured him that Daladier was making a good job of things, and that the French army was in fine shape, and that the morale of the nation had steadied down to a grim resolution, though conscious that Germany was increasing her armed forces and playing the game of power politics with a ruthlessness and cunning of technique which one day, not many months ahead, would fling Europe in flames.

"Paris will be like the ruins of Madrid," said one of these well-informed young men. "I'm not looking forward to the fun. May Adolf Hitler die of cancer in the throat!"

John Barton was glad to leave Paris, because it was on his way to Cherbourg, where a good boat was waiting for him bound for New York, where he had a rendezvous with love.

XXVIII

ANNE was waiting for him at the dockside. He saw her standing there with her brother David and Diana Feversham with her father and mother. As he knew from her letters, Anne was staying with the Fevershams in an apartment on Park Avenue which they had taken for the visit of the King and Queen, the World's Fair and other causes of social interest.

She was waiting for him on the dockside and she saw him signal to her, semaphoring with his hat from A Deck. She kissed her hand to him and he felt his heart give a lurch. He had waited long for this meeting. He had sent his spirit to this dockside across the Atlantic from Prague, Vienna, Berlin, Rome and Paris. He had counted the weeks and the days, and, in the smoking-room of the ship, the hours, with a desperate kind of impatient patience. He had kept socially aloof from his fellow passengers. He had sulked in his cabin like Ulysses in his tent. He had given short answers at the captain's table. He had dodged chatty mothers with their vivacious daughters. He had leaned over the ship's rail watching its wake and saying "Hurry up, get a move on. Sure this is a slow old boat." He had read several books without knowing what they were about. He had walked a thousand miles, he guessed, up and down B Deck, refusing nourishment offered him each half-hour by stewards with cups of broth and cups of tea.

He had pretended to be asleep in deck-chairs when fellow Americans had shown signs of conversational impulses, wanting to know what he could tell them about the latest dope from Europe. He had looked at his wrist-watch a million times and wondered if the darned thing had

stopped, because every minute seemed like an hour. He had thrown his heart overboard, to reach the landing-stage before the boat docked. Now, at last, Anne was there among the crowd by the customs office, and when she kissed her hands to him he felt like a knight back from the wars and glad to greet his lady.

"Say, Johnny Barton," inquired one of the reporters who had come aboard, "I'll take it as a favour if you put a word to Lady Anne and persuade her to be snapped with your arms round her. They'll be crazy about it in the social department."

"If you want to be killed, old friend," said Barton, "that's a quick and easy way. I come from cities where they specialize in assassination."

"Say, John Barton," said another pressman and photographer, "why in hell have you picked up the English accent? Why don't you take the marbles out of your mouth?"

"You make me very tired," said Barton. "Haven't I been handing out the lowdown on Europe to you for the last two hours? Haven't you taken my noble profile from every angle?"

"Say, Johnny Barton," said another ship's reporter, "ain't you putting on a lot of English edge? I remember when you and me did the Breitmann murder together and you was darned glad to earn your ten dollars a day and expenses paid. Now you come back from Europe looking like a Wodehouse Englishman—Johnny Nose-in-air."

Barton gripped his arm.

"That's unkind," he said, "after all the drinks I've bought you. John Barton hasn't changed to his old friends, believe me. He's the same guy. Yes, sir."

"I'll say he is," said an Irishman on one of the New York evening papers; "and if anyone denies it I'll put my fist down his throat. Johnny Barton is a good newspaper man and a good scout. I've read his pieces from the European madhouse, and I've learnt a lot from them,

believe me. I've learnt to think that New York is a sight better than Berlin or Vienna, or London or Paris, because it's a long way from Hitler, though not so far as we think, may be. See what I mean, boys?"

Barton suffered excruciating torment until all delays were over, and he stepped down the gangway behind some of his fellow passengers.

"Hullo, Anne!" he said, as though he had seen her two hours before.

He was shy before her. He was shy of looking her in the eyes.

"Hullo, John," she answered. "Aren't you going to kiss me?"

"You bet I am," said John.

He was quite unconscious of twenty cameras registering his embrace as a subject of social and romantic interest reproduced in many papers from New York to San Francisco.

Johnny Barton, former New York reporter, gives homecoming kiss to Lady Anne Ede, daughter of English Earl and playmate of English Queen.

"Welcome to our city," said Diana, when John had time to remember his friends.

"John," said her father, "Mrs. Feversham and I, to say nothing of Diana, are very happy in having Lady Anne Ede to stay with us. She permits us to call her Anne, and if I say that she holds all our hearts in the hollow of her hand, I should be guilty of the English fault of understatement."

"Now, Alfred," cried Mrs. Feversham, "you're standing between me and my chance of saying a word to an American homecomer. John, my dear, New York ought to have its flags out, and it's just an oversight of which we hope you'll forgive us."

"Why, Mrs. Feversham," said John, "it looks to me as

if I'm getting an unusual welcome, and I feel mighty glad about it. How are you, David?"

He shook hands with Anne's brother, who looked amazingly English among the American passengers beginning to prepare for their struggle through the customs.

"I'm putting in an interesting time," said David, "before I go to Washington next week. There's a lot to be said for New York."

Diana laughed as though he had said something very witty.

"Lots of people say lots about it," she said.

Mr. Alfred Bryan Feversham seemed to have a secret password with the customs officers. John's baggage was passed without being opened.

And Mr. Alfred Bryan Feversham was a man of tact, kind heart and delicate sensibility.

"Now, John," he said, "we all know that we're very much in the way until you've exchanged a few words with our charming visitor, so we've arranged to fade out for a few hours. You'll find a big-sized Packard waiting for you in the usual place. That's for you and Anne. The rest of us will crowd into a taxi and meet you later. And as a friend of your father, I'd just like to add one word. We're proud of you, John. You've been a fine interpreter of European affairs. Mother and I have quarrelled at the breakfast-table to be first with your dispatches. They've been great, and your name stands high on this side of the Atlantic among the friends of England, who are not growing less, believe me."

"Alfred," said Mrs. Feversham, "you're talking too much as usual. You're holding up the traffic and tiring Lady Anne."

"On the contrary," said Anne, "he's saying things I like to hear."

Mr. Feversham raised his hat. David raised his hand, Diana twiddled two fingers and turned to David with a laugh.

"Well, this is very nice," said Anne, inside a big Packard with John by her side. "I dare say you're glad to be back, John."

John was holding her hand rather tight, so tight that it hurt her, though she didn't squeal.

"That's right," he answered with a laugh. "I'm not displeased to be back. I've been looking forward to it rather. Say, Anne, you're looking terribly beautiful. You're more beautiful than I've dreamt you were in Prague and Vienna and Berlin and Rome. And when you kissed me on the dockside I wanted to say a prayer of thanksgiving for all the world to hear!"

"Well, it seemed the right thing to do," said Anne, with a flutter of eyelashes.

"Tell me," he said, "how do you find New York?"

"I find it a great place for parties," said Anne. "The inhabitants of New York like getting together."

"Have they been kind to you?" asked John.

"They've nearly killed me with kindness," said Anne. "I don't get enough sleep."

"I guess they are crazy about you," said John.

"Say, Bo," said Anne, "I guess they get tickled to death when I try to speak the American language!"

"Don't try," said John. "You're English. I like you to keep English. And you'll never learn the American language according to Mr. Mencken. It's very difficult."

"David is in love with Diana," said Anne presently as the Packard car made its way between tall fortresses which reached the clouds.

"No!" said John! "You don't say!"

"I do," said Anne. "It was love at first sight."

"Well now, that's great news," said John. "I used to have a soft spot in my heart for her myself once."

Anne glanced sideways at him with a smile. "Yes, I had an idea she was an old flame of yours. Why did you abandon her for me? She's much more suitable for you really, don't you think?"

"Anne," said John, "if you say things like that, I shall burst into tears and spoil that pretty frock of yours. Now tell me, what do you know about the Americans? What do you think about life on this side of the world? I feel terribly English among my own folk. I shall have to become re-Americanized. Gee, I'm getting scared of this traffic."

Anne laughed at him for his illusion that he was terribly English and de-Americanized.

"My dear John," she told him, "if I met you in the Libyan desert dressed like an Arab and riding on a camel, I should know you as an American at first glance. You can't disguise yourself."

"Is that so?" he asked, with a look of surprise. "Well now, I'm not ashamed of it so long as you don't mind."

"I like it," said Anne. "One of these days I'm going to marry an American."

"If I'm that American," said John with great emotion, "I shall dedicate myself to Anglo-American understanding, and there's no time like the present for that good work. Anne, I want to kiss you again. I want to understand you. I want you to understand me. I'm crazy about you."

The driver of Mr. Feversham's Packard was aware that there was some pretty work going on behind his back. He grinned at a traffic cop in Park Avenue, who held up a tide of gleaming metal for three seconds or so.

"I can't see anything wrong with New York," said John, giving his hand to Anne as he helped her out of the car. "It seems to me an attractive kind of place. I doubt whether the Garden of Eden could put anything over little old New York as a pleasure resort for nice people."

He had made a rendezvous with love—and hadn't missed the boat.

XXIX

JOHN BARTON had a good reception at the *Observer's* office downtown. The chief of the news staff, Mr. Charles Seligmann, that gum-chewing slave-driver of junior reporters, pushed back his eyeshade, shifted his stump of a cigar between his lips and shook him heartily by the hand.

"Glad to see you back, Johnny," he said. "You're looking fine, and the Old Man's pleased with your stuff. I can't say I liked it myself. We're overdoing all this European drama, but it's nice to have you back. Better slip out of those English clothes, hadn't you? They make you look a stranger in this office."

He kept wringing John's hand and held it while he used his own left hand to answer a telephone call.

"Yep, get that story, sonny. We can do with a lot of it . . . Well, talk to him, can't yer? Tell him we're at the back of him. See what I mean?"

He banged down the receiver and spoke to John again.

"It's that trial of the Deutch-Schutz gang and its aftermath. The Old Man thinks Dewey may run for the presidency if Mr. Roosevelt decides not to run a third time. It's the first time a higher-up in municipal graft has been caught and convicted. Mr. Dewey as prosecuting counsel has come out into the limelight as one of our big men. He'll go far. Maybe he'll go as far as the White House."

John nodded. He had heard something about that. He had read something about it in his own paper, and had tried to explain it to English friends. They couldn't quite see why a prosecuting lawyer who had successfully convicted a Tammany leader who had been running a lottery racket should leap into national prominence as a possible candidate

for the Presidency. It wanted a lot of explaining—this cleaning up of New York corruption against powerful and sinister influences—this painstaking courage which has tracked down one of the 'higher-ups', who hid behind a façade of respectability and benevolence. Over in Europe all that seemed rather small and unimportant compared with power politics and the rivalry of nations.

Charlie Seligmann gave him a friendly punch on the shoulder.

"Great news," he said—"about your engagement to a certain dame of high caste. When it came into the office it took us by surprise. It was Birdie Meyer who broke it to us. Johnny Barton is betrothed to an English peeress, she told us, as though announcing the world's end."

John laughed uneasily at this anecdote and felt embarrassed. He hated the idea that Anne should be the subject of newspaper gossip and distorted facts. He had an ancient grudge against Miss Birdie Meyer who did the social news. She had done her best to vamp him until he froze her off.

"She's not a peeress," he told Charlie Seligmann, and anyhow, it's my private affair, Charlie. I'd like you to meet her, I'd like you and Mrs. Seligmann to come round and have a little dinner with us one night."

"Well, I ain't a social man," said Charlie Seligmann, "I'm a newspaper man first and last, but I'd feel mighty flattered by the invitation. It'll please Mrs. Seligmann."

He shook hands again with John. It was the third time he had shaken hands with him.

"Well, now, I feel as if my own son had returned to the old home. The Old Man wants a word with you. See you later, sonny. Time marches on. Yesterday's news is dead today. A great life, ain't it?"

John tapped at the door of Mr. Julius K. Lansing, proprietor and chief of the *New York Observer*, and one of America's great old newspaper men, respected by everybody and feared by his staff, because he had no patience with

fools, slackers, or the incompetent, or the unlucky. He had fired many a man for being unlucky on a news-story, where always a little luck is a help to success. He had fired many a man for faking his facts. But he was generous to those whose work pleased his critical and penetrating eye.

He was friendly now and not ungenerous to John Barton, who had poured imprecations upon his silver hair for postponing his date of sailing and sending him round Europe when his heart was otherwise engaged.

"Glad to see you, Barton," he said, pushing back some paper on his desk. "Take a seat. Have a cigarette. You're looking fine and dandy."

"I hope you're feeling well, Mr. Lansing," said John, with a prick of guilty conscience for many swear words hurled across the Atlantic at this distinguished and handsome old gentleman, who, after all, had given him his great chance which had led to England, and Lady Anne Ede, and many adventures in the European jungle.

"I'm getting older," said Mr. Lansing, with a little smile, "but I still carry on. I want to say, first of all, Barton, that I'm not in the habit of handing over bouquets but I've been mighty well pleased with your work in Europe."

John acknowledged this compliment with modesty.

"Now, what I've liked best about your work," said Mr. Lansing, "is your sense of truth and fairness, especially to England and Mr. Chamberlain's policy. You took a chance in defending Mr. Chamberlain's motive for the policy of appeasement and the Munich Agreement which saved the world war at that time when England and France were unprepared for it. We took a chance in printing your interpretation of those events. It was out of line with most American comment, very hostile to that viewpoint over-eager to accuse Mr. Chamberlain of treachery and cowardice, when in my judgment, as well as yours, he was acting in the best interests of peace and humanity, not altered because Hitler has betrayed his pledges and thrown

off his mask. I take it, Barton, that the gap of time since Munich has enabled both France and England to consolidate their defences and get more level with Germany's preparedness?"

"That's so, Mr. Lansing," said John. "Though I must admit——"

Mr. Lansing made a little movement with his cigar. When he was talking to one of his staff, it was he who did the talking.

"I reckon," he said, "that the show-down will come some time in the early fall. Your last messages seemed to confirm that view."

"It's like this, Mr. Lansing," said John. "The British Government has pledged itself——"

Mr. Lansing made that gesture with his cigar again.

"You know more about these things, Barton, than I do, having been so long in the troubled places over there, but in my judgment Mr. Chamberlain has taken great risks in committing himself to Poland, and those other Balkan States, all of 'em in a state of flux and all of 'em very unreliable. Then there's the riddle of Russia. I don't see how England and France can hope to defend Poland without the aid of Russia, and I haven't altered my opinion about those blood-soaked Bolsheviks and their particular genius for double-crossing. England shouldn't bank on them as loyal allies. I've pretty good information that they're talking business with Hitler's agents."

John raised his eyebrows with astonishment.

"Say, Mr. Lansing, that's very serious, if it's true."

Mr. Lansing nodded, and swung round a little in his swivel chair.

"We've a good man in Moscow," he said. "But I'm not springing that on the world just yet. I'm more concerned with our own foreign policy and the blind stupidity of Mr. Roosevelt's political enemies, who are so anxious to humiliate and weaken him that they can't see the dangers looming ahead for the United States. If there's a world

war, we're in it. If Great Britain goes down, it won't do us any good. If we refuse to aid England and France in the coming struggle, we shall be betraying our own ideals of liberty, to say nothing of our vital and self-interests."

"I'm with you a hundred per cent there, Mr. Lansing," said John warmly.

"That's good of you," said the old gentleman drily. "And now that you know my views, I'm sending you to Washington to play up the need of revising those Neutrality Laws which hold back Mr. Roosevelt's influence in world affairs on the side of the liberty-loving nations. I'm out to kill the isolationists, Barton. I'm all out to support Mr. Roosevelt in his challenge to the dictators, and his fight for freedom of action at the White House against the defection of his own party and the disloyalty of those who called themselves his friends. It's a great chance for you. I'll put you on the front page. I want you to make it a great campaign with Europe's coming war and its cauldron as your background of argument. I want you to knock hell out of American isolation."

John saw the glint of steel in Mr. Lansing's eyes. He could see that his chief was hot on the trail for isolationists' scalps, and he was a ruthless old gentleman when he once got going.

"I'll do my best, Mr. Lansing," he said, "though I'll probably lose some of my best friends, and raise trouble at their dinner-tables."

"You're a newspaper man, ain't you?" asked Mr. Lansing.

He seemed to remember for a moment that this young man was also human, and he spoke again in a friendly and gentle tone.

"I'd like to put in my word of congratulation on your private affairs, which have crept into the news, as most private affairs are apt to do these days."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Lansing," said John. "I surely appreciate that very much."

"And if," said Lansing, "I could have the privilege of meeting Lady Anne Ede I should be much gratified. Mrs. Lansing has commissioned me to ask you and Lady Anne to dine with us next Thursday at eight o'clock."

If John Barton had been asked by King George to dine with him at Buckingham Palace he would not have been more surprised. It was a thing unknown in the history of the *Observer* office, apart from Charlie Seligmann and his wife. He felt it to be a very high distinction, equal to the Victoria Cross in England or the Ribbon of the Legion of Honour in France.

"I'm going up in the world," he thought. "Anne is helping me. I'm in luck."

XXX

MR. ALFRED BRYAN FEVERSHAM and Mrs. Feversham gave a party in honour of John Barton. They had already given three parties in honour of Lady Anne Ede and Mr. David Ede who were staying with them. Many of their friends had returned the compliment by giving parties in honour of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Feversham and their English guests. Perhaps that was why Anne said New York was a city which made a habit of getting together.

It was some party, with sixteen to dinner and sixty after dinner. They were nice people, mostly perhaps of the younger married set, who doubtless would like to meet Lady Anne Ede, Mr. David Ede and Mr. John Barton, the well-known correspondent of the *New York Observer*, whose dispatches from Europe were as familiar on the breakfast-tables as the grape-fruit and the post-toasties. At the dinner-table, John had been placed next to Anne, who had at her left side that well-known American novelist, Austin Crash, who was always on the top line of best-sellers with twenty-four black dots in the *New York Herald-Tribune* opposite the title of his latest work, signifying that he headed the list of novels in demand at the leading book stores in the United States. David Ede was placed on the opposite side of the table next to Diana Feversham, and seemed pleased with this arrangement. Two senators and their wives from Massachusetts honoured the board. The young wives of the younger married set, very charmingly dressed—that is to say, exceedingly nude—were distributed among young men whose white ties were works of art and whose evening clothes had a distinctly American cut according to the observation of one of their fellow countrymen, who had

been measured for his evening suit in Cork Street, London.

"What's the difference," thought John, "between this little group and a similar party in London? Somehow there's a difference. It's in the tone and tempo of their speech. It's in their lack of the English inhibitions of reticence and lying-back. I guess I've become very English. I'll have to take out new naturalization papers."

Anne looked beautiful of course. She had beautiful shoulders which she was not ashamed to show. John felt shy of her. He was jealous of that fellow Austin Crash on the other side of her. He was a great talker and Anne seemed interested, but a little challenging. John made polite conversation with the wife of one of the senators on his right, but kept an ear open to the dialogue on his left.

"There are things about the English," said Austin Crash, at the fish stage of the meal, "which I fail to understand, and I should be glad of a little help."

"I'll do my best," said Anne amiably, "but surely there's nothing you don't understand, Mr. Crash? Aren't you the chief American interpreter of life and the human heart?"

"That's what my publishers write about me," said Austin Crash. "I'd like to think it was true, but the rumour may be exaggerated. No, coming back to little old England, which rained on me once for three weeks without stopping, I confess to considerable bewilderment, and I'd like to get it cleaned up, if I might ask a few frank and simple questions."

"I'm listening," said Anne graciously.

"Well, now," said Austin Crash, "how is it that you English people with your old and proud traditions through a thousand years of history allow yourselves to have your foreign policy dictated by Nancy Astor and her Cliveden House Group of Fascists and pro-Germans, according to our distinguished columnists who seem to know and keep on saying what they seem to know?"

Anne turned her shoulder slightly away from John,

much to his regret, and smiled at Austin Crash, a tall young man with a good-natured-looking face and carefully disordered hair.

"That's all new to me," she told him. "I've heard of Nancy Astor—in fact I've met her once or twice. But I've never heard of the Cliveden House Group. Who are they?"

Austin Crash abandoned his fish.

"Is that an honest answer, Lady Anne, or have I been grossly misinformed? Say, you've never heard of the Cliveden House Group? Why, it's one of the most famous secret societies ever revealed to American readers, to their great horror and delight. The Cliveden House Group figures in all our headlines."

He gave the names of its members. They included Mr. Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister, Lord Lothian, Mr. Amery, the British Ambassador in Berlin, and some of the most famous names in England. It was they who connived at the annexation of Austria. It was they, according to his information, who arranged the betrayal of Czechoslovakia.

"Do you believe that fairy tale?" asked Anne. "Do you believe what you read in the gossip columns of the American papers? There's not a word of truth in that story. It's too ridiculous!"

"Well, now," said Mr. Austin Crash, "that's where I've got it all wrong, then. I accept your word for it, Lady Anne. As a student of human nature I know when a lady looks me in the eyes and lies. You have truth-telling eyes, Lady Anne. If you say there's no such thing as the Cliveden House set, I can only say that I'm shocked and surprised. Now there's another little thing I'd like to ask."

"It may shock and surprise you if I answer again," said Anne.

"I'll risk it," said Austin Crash.

John was unable to follow the thread of this conversation. The senator's wife was putting him wise to the latest

iniquities of Mr. Roosevelt, whom she called 'that man'. She had been very eloquent on the subject, and for politeness' sake it was necessary to pay some attention to her indictment, though he disagreed with most of what she said. It was only later when the usual ice-cream was served on his plate that he was able to turn to Anne again. She and Austin Crash were having an intellectual duel.

"But surely, Lady Anne," said the famous novelist, "you must admit that England betrayed the League of Nations when it abandoned the policy of collective security?"

Anne answered quickly and brightly—rather too quickly and brightly to still a slight sense of uneasiness in the mind of her loving John.

"Didn't your people betray the League in its little cradle? Didn't they abandon that infant in its swaddling clothes?"

Austin Crash laughed very good-humouredly. He was enjoying himself with Lady Anne.

"Oh, that's a long time ago! A new generation has arisen since then, taking no responsibility for the sins of their fathers. Ninety million people in this country—don't quote me figures because I'm a literary man and not a statistician—panted with idealism for the Covenant of the League and the moral duty of putting it across the dictators. That's why some of us are disappointed with England's fumbling foreign policy, as it seems to us. They've been dodging that issue ever since Hitler came into power. They've abandoned half a dozen of the smaller nations, including Austria, and four hundred million people called the Chinese. Aren't these the facts, or have I been misinformed again?"

Anne was very swift in her answer—too swift perhaps, thought the over-anxious John.

"Why should you want England to be the policeman of the world?" she asked. "Do you call that collective security? As for those four hundred million Chinese,

aren't your big industrialists selling their scrap-iron to Japan to help on the massacre of Chinese babies? And don't you share the policeman's duty? Or are you strictly neutral while you keep goading us into a war we don't want and can't afford because we lost a million men in the one before?"

Austin Crash turned to look at her with renewed admiration and astonished amusement.

"Lady Anne," he said with sham gravity, "you're very beautiful, if you will allow me to say so, but you are also very wise and wonderful. As a political debater you vie with the late Senator Lodge. I have crossed swords with a very skilled fencer."

John had the privilege of some conversation with her from time to time during this dinner, and she talked about his sister, Judy, from whom she had had a letter that morning. She and Robin were having a wonderful time at the country house lent them by Vera, Lady Munstead. Anne also had a good deal to say about the visit of the King and Queen, which John had missed. This topic interested the senator's wife, Mrs. Vernon Jennings Crawley, who was delighted to confirm Anne's belief that the visit had been a very great success.

"A smash hit, my dear," she said. "Your Queen Elizabeth won all our hearts and so did your intelligent young King—though some of us still have a soft spot in our hearts about his elder brother. Of course I don't suppose we always did the right thing. We're not in the habit of receiving kings and queens, especially the King and Queen of a great Empire like yours. We're a democratic people, we're a little self-conscious about any adulation of royalty. But we know whom we like, and we liked that charming lady who drove through New York like a fairy princess and smiled at the crowds as though she wanted to kiss them, and by a little wave of her white-gloved hand seemed to salute every one of them in person. My dear, I found it all perfectly thrilling! And the American people

found it perfectly thrilling, and without any shadow in their minds. Those two young people were so simple that one lost one's sense of their social rank. It was wonderful the way they chatted to everyone within reach of them, including the press photographers who had made their lives a burden. If it hadn't been for those awful people in the White House!"

"What awful people?" asked Anne.

"Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt," said the senator's wife in a lowered voice. "Oh, my dear, it makes me blush to think of it. It makes me go all hot and cold with horror and humiliation."

There had been a general buzz of conversation at this dinner-table. It had been louder even than a general buzz. The men were talking at their ease. The women were laughing vivaciously. Someone told a good joke and there was a wave of laughter at one end of the table. But for some reason there was a moment's quietude and into that second of silence Anne's clear English voice rang out.

"Oh, I don't think you ought to say that. The Roosevelts gave the King and Queen a wonderful time. Mrs. Roosevelt mothered them marvellously. As for President Roosevelt, I must confess I should like to kiss him. He's one of the finest men on earth, and he's giving the world a lead."

That second of silence at an American dinner-table lengthened into two seconds. It was very deep and still. John Barton felt the ground quake beneath his feet. Anne had spilt the beans.

"Oh, Lady Anne," cried Mrs. Vernon Jennings Crawley, "what you've just said is surely terrible! If such words were spoken in my own house I should have to leave the room. I should have to go and lie down."

Mr. Alfred Bryan Feversham, the giver of this feast, spoke across the table to the young lady in whose honour it had been given.

"Lady Anne," he said, with hidden laughter in his eyes,

"I must warn you that you are approaching the edge of deep waters, very easily ruffled into a storm, in which ships are sunk and souls perish."

"Alfred," cried Mrs. Feversham from the other end of the table, "I implore you not to start a conversation on that man."

But the conversation had already started. It was at a time when political passion was running high, when those who approved of Mr. Roosevelt's policy did so more intensely than before, and when those who disapproved did so with a kind of burning sense of injured morality and righteous indignation.

A clear, hard-cut voice snapped across the table. It was the voice of a tall young man with very blue jaws and very bright eyes.

"If Lady Anne will allow me to say so, I agree with her one hundred per cent. Mr. Roosevelt——"

An elegant young woman, bare-backed to the waist, laughed on a shrill note.

"Well, now we're going to hear all about it. Mr. Smedley is going to tell us why he admires a President who has violated the Constitution, trampled on American liberty, degraded the Supreme Court, played into the hands of graft and corruption, and bought the votes which carried him into the White House."

"Mrs. Hawley Snoot," said a grave voice like that of a judge delivering a death sentence, "I have a great respect for your talent for interior decoration and a great liking for your husband, but I regret to hear words like that spoken at a dinner-table where I am an invited guest. Those words are a grave slander upon the personal character and political integrity of a great man, who, in spite of a serious handicap, has served his country with untiring devotion and upheld its dignity throughout the world in a time of chaos and increasing danger."

A young man sitting one place removed from David Ede addressed this judge-like gentleman.

"Perhaps I may be allowed to challenge that remark about upholding the dignity of the United States. I read a good many foreign newspapers and they tend to agree that Mr. Roosevelt has made himself the laughing-stock of nations by his moral preaching and his ineffective acts."

"Well, Charlie," said another young man, "you may read some of the foreign papers, but I happen to have left Europe with a different impression. In Paris, and London, believe me, Mr. Roosevelt's reputation stands very high, and he added to it considerably by the letters he addressed to the dictators during the September crisis of last year and March of this year."

Mrs. Hawley Snoot had something to say to the last speaker.

"That's good news for England and France," she said sharply. "Those two countries play up to Mr. Roosevelt because he tries to get behind the Neutrality Acts and lead his country and people to a world war which is no concern of theirs. As usual, they want us to pull the chestnuts out of the fire."

"I don't like that phrase, Mrs. Hawley Snoot," said a middle-aged lady with prematurely white hair, the complexion of a new-born babe, and the beautiful back of Rembrandt's Venus above her sash. "It sounds vulgar to me and it's been used too often as a newspaper *cliché*. I take it that Mr. Roosevelt's foreign policy is to save humanity from a world war."

Mrs. Feversham raised both hands with a gesture of comical despair.

"This is getting dreadful," she cried. "Alfred, it's all your fault."

Austin Crash, who had been having such a good time with Anne, smiled at her and thought she had something to do with it.

"I feel very guilty," said Anne. "But this is extremely amusing. Can't you ginger it up a little?"

Austin Crash gingered it up.

"Speaking as a novelist," he said, "I have a profound admiration for Mr. Roosevelt, and an almost passionate devotion to Mrs. Roosevelt. They provide me with that passion, that psychological conflict, that human drama without which the novelist is undone. And apart from that professional interest, I acclaim Mr. Roosevelt as one of the great outstanding characters of world history and a flaming spirit who has regenerated the dull and dumb despair of American Labour, which was deprived of work through weary years of distress, and was hungry and hopeless. I shall never forget the time when Mr. Roosevelt's clarion voice—as clear as a silver trumpet—spoke to the nation when it was stricken in the economic blizzard of 1929. We were lying flat on our backs. Some of us have forgotten that. The banks were all shut. Our fairy gold had faded. We had many millions of unemployed. Mr. Hoover had been the greatest failure ever known in Washington. Then suddenly Franklin Roosevelt spoke to us and his voice raised us as though from death. He gave us hope. He gave us a lead. He was cheerful, confident, strong. Since then I've been a Roosevelt man."

"That was good," said Anne. "Full marks."

"Young man," said Mrs. Vernon Jennings Crawley, the senator's wife, who was sitting near enough to make her voice heard, "I've been a great admirer of your novels. I read the *Serpent's Kiss* with considerable pleasure. I wept over the *Judas Touch*. I went crazy over *The Brand of Cain*. But after those words of yours about Mr. Roosevelt I shall cancel my subscription to your next book. I never heard such foolish statements in all my life. And what's worse, Mr. Crash, you're saying them before a young English girl who will be terribly led astray by them."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Anne. "I'm not easily led astray. Am I, John?"

"I'll say you're not," said John, disturbed by the scene which Anne had raised.

It raged for quite a long time. There was challenge
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and counter-challenge. One gentleman became very red in the face and was rude to Mrs. Hawley Snoot. The lady with the snow-white hair and the beautiful back turned her shoulder upon a young man with whom she disagreed so passionately that she could not bear to look at him.

"Ladies, ladies!" cried Mrs. Feversham.

She led them away from the dinner-table to her drawing-room on the seventh floor of an apartment-house in Park Avenue.

"Well, this has been very entertaining," said Mr. Alfred Feversham. "Have some port, gentlemen. Have some cigars. David, my dear fellow, you've not been drinking anything."

Austin Crash drew his chair nearer to John's.

"Barton," he said, "Lady Anne Ede has one American knocked out. She's the most beautiful thing I've seen yet. She has the spirit of a Tudor Queen, and the charm of Marguerite de Valois. But I guess you know."

"I guess I do," said John, not displeased by this enthusiasm.

XXXI

THERE were other parties. Anne complained that she was suffering from lack of sleep. But she regarded this as a physical infirmity which could not be allowed to interfere with her American education and her social pleasure in meeting John's friends and fellow countrymen. She took her American education seriously. It was a little distressing to John to answer questions on American expressions, political controversies and economic mysteries when he wanted to hold her hand, or, still more, to look into her eyes and talk of love.

"John," she asked, when they were alone together one afternoon in the Fevershams' drawing-room, "what is the A.F. of L., and also what is the C.I.O.? I feel I ought to know. I hear those mystical letters being spoken by many people as though they represented angels of light or demons of darkness. Surely I ought to know about them?"

John laughed ruefully.

"I wanted to talk about wedding bells," he said. "I wanted to talk about a happy date in history. All that's terribly dull for an English mind, like most American politics. I assure you, Anne——"

"Yes, but what is the A.F. of L.?" asked Anne, like Bluebeard's seventh wife asking about the secret chamber.

"The American Federation of Labour," explained John patiently. "It was the first body to represent organized labour in this country which is still a long way behind England in that direction. It did a power of good in its time to raise wages and factory conditions though it kept itself non-political, on the whole. Does that bore you?"

"Not in the least," said Anne. "I find it extremely interesting. Well, then, what is the C.I.O.?"

John groaned with another laugh to soften it.

"The C.I.O.," he said, "is the Committee of Industrial Organization. It was founded by a Welshman named John Lewis. It caused a split in the A.F. of L. He was more aggressive and more political, and he backed up strikes which led to riots and blue smoke. The President got wrong with him. There has been an intense hostility between him and the A.F. of L., but now there's a kind of truce. You see, the President granted the rights of organized representation in trade disputes. It's the workers' charter of rights. And now there's a call to a truce and Mr. Roosevelt is being backed by both bodies because Mr. Roosevelt's enemies are preparing an attack in Congress on the Act which gives them these rights. It's going to be a fight to the finish. Big Business says it wants protection as well as the workers. It's one of the knives they're sharpening on the grindstone to kill the President's chance of a third term. And if that's not illuminating, I can't help it. After the European drama it sounds to me like small beer."

"Yes," said Anne, "but that's what I find so interesting. Here we are in the United States, bitterly divided about the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O."—she pronounced those letters as though they were a magic spell—"while over in Europe millions of men are under arms, and thousands of people are being dragged off to concentration camps, and every little nation is trembling in its boots because they're afraid that they will hear, one day, the sound of hostile wings in their patch of sky, and the roar of guns firing on their homesteads. New York seems to be on a different planet—so far away from all that, so safe, so isolated. To them, Europe seems to be only a serial plot for the newsreel and the newspapers. They're vastly interested in it, but only just as we in England are interested in a new detective story or a thrilling picture—*I Was a German Spy*, or, *You Can't Take it with You*—at the New Gallery Cinema. It's wonderful to be born an American. I find it so touching to hear all this talk about the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. in a

world which is rushing towards doom according to the correspondents in London. I feel I'm in a fairy tale. I feel I have come to another world with other standards and other values."

"Yes," said John thoughtfully. "I've the same sensation after being in Europe for quite a time. All that discussion the other night about Mr. Roosevelt——"

Anne laughed.

"Oh, it was all my fault. But I must say I enjoyed myself."

"Enough is as good as a feast," said John, with a hint of warning. "If I were you, Anne, I'd keep off American politics. I don't want you to get caught up in them. Just be your beautiful English self, giving us a treat when you come to a party."

Anne thought she ought to take an intelligent interest in things. She didn't want to be regarded as a doll, beautiful but dumb.

"I should like to know something about the Tennessee Valley," she told this ardent lover. "That seems to be one of the dark pits full of blood and bones. Or is it something to do with electric light?"

"Anne," said John, "let's talk about the Elizabethan poets. Let's talk about our honeymoon. What about Florida for our Garden of Eden?"

"Let's talk about Florida," said Anne, with her zest for information.

He talked about Florida at some length, with its flying fishes, its translucent sea, its enchanted coast, until she reminded him that it was time to dress for Mr. Lansing's party.

John jumped up as though he had been shot, and looked at his wrist-watch.

"If we keep that old man waiting for dinner," he said, "I shall get fired, and then I shan't be able to take you to Florida."

He went off to dress at the Lotus Club where he had a room.

XXXII

ANNE made a very good impression upon Mr. Julius K. Lansing. She played up to him very nobly for John's sake, and it was obvious before the evening was over that this old gentleman with a glint of steel in his eyes, before whom the staff of the *Observer* office trembled in their boots if summoned to his presence, was ready to eat out of her hand, as they say in England. He was very much taken by her charm and beauty. He was even more taken by her intelligence and desire for information which he was delighted to give her at considerable length.

Mr. Lansing had arranged only a small party. They were a different type from those who had discussed Mr. Roosevelt with some warmth at Mr. Feversham's party. They were more elderly and more old-fashioned. The British Consul-General and his wife were there, with Mr. and Mrs. Vandembosch, the acknowledged leaders of New York's reigning families, and Dr. and Mrs. Jonathan Lee Phillips, Ph.D., of Yale University.

They were already assembled in the drawing-room of one of the last remaining brownstone houses of old New York when Anne and John arrived. John was rather breathless and nervous, having had a desperate struggle with cuff-links, collar-studs and white ties in his bedroom at the Lotus Club, and finally he had had to call for a negro valet to render first aid.

Anne, whom he had fetched in a taxi from Park Avenue, was perfectly cool and unruffled in one of those frocks which she had bought in London with Diana Feversham. It was a frock in the style of the crinoline period, and as she came into Mr. Lansing's drawing-room she looked

more than ever like the portrait of a lady by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

"My dear," said Mrs. Lansing, a little old lady with white hair and old-fashioned manners, "it is very nice to see you here in a little old New York house. You make me think of England as I remember it on summer days when there were roses in an English garden, where Mr. Lansing and I passed our honeymoon."

"How sweet of you to say so," answered Anne, rather touched by this pretty speech.

Anne sat next to Mr. Lansing at his dinner-table, and John was beyond reach of her at the other end of the table next to Mrs. Lansing, but near enough to hear what she was saying from time to time, and near enough to see with amazement and inward satisfaction her conquest of his fierce old chief. Mr. Lansing surprised him by the courtliness of his manner and by the good humour in his eyes. It was not the Julius K. Lansing of the *Observer* office downtown. An English novelist had written a book of interviews with the great, entitled *Are They the Same at Home?* Mr. Lansing was not the same at home. He was transformed into a benevolent-looking old gent who might have warmed the heart of Charles Dickens. The only sign of his office manner was when his coloured butler dropped a spoon on to the polished floor making some clatter, calling forth a flash of forked lightning from Mr. Lansing's steely eyes.

Anne asked for information and received it. John did not hear her exact question, but it related to America's attitude to Europe in case of war. She hoped that the United States would come in a bit quicker than they did last time.

John felt the first symptoms of prickly heat. He hoped very humbly in his heart that Anne would not embarrass him by spilling the beans. In his moment of anxiety he made the wrong answer to Mrs. Vandembosch, who wished to know what was the English reaction to the Americans' reception of their King and Queen.

"Yes," he said. "That's perfectly true, Mrs. Vandebosch. I must say I agree with you."

Mr. Lansing was answering Anne at some length. His guests ceased their own conversation to listen-in.

"There's pretty good evidence, Lady Anne," he said, "that the American trend of opinion is in advance of their representatives in Congress for a revision of the Neutrality Laws favourable to England and France. I dare say you've heard of our straw votes."

Anne confessed that she had never heard of their straw votes.

"They're interesting," said Mr. Lansing, "as a rough indication of changes in American ideas and sentiment. They're conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion which takes cross sections of the community and asks them to vote on certain questions. Now, for instance, before the Czech crisis last year those who voted in favour of supplying Britain and France with raw materials in time of war was, if I remember rightly, thirty-four per cent. This March, just before Hitler broke his pledges to Mr. Chamberlain and walked into Czechoslovakia, the votes in favour of such action had risen to fifty-five per cent. Then after the annexation of that State, the voting rose again to something like seventy-five per cent, or two-thirds of the American people, if this representative voting indicated a general trend throughout the country."

"How extremely interesting," said Anne in her clear, fresh voice. "Why, that's wonderful and very reassuring, don't you think?"

Mr. Lansing thought it was somewhat reassuring to the extent that the President's recent endeavours to break the narrow policy of isolation was going step by step with American public opinion.

"It's only the backwoodsmen of Congress and the Senate who oppose the feeling of the country," he said, "because of personal hatred of the President. But they'll discover in due course that they're on the wrong track and

likely to lose out. I'm going to help them discover with the assistance of John Barton over there."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Anne with enthusiasm. "I'm sure John will like that adventure. I know he hates those silly old Neutrality Laws."

Mr. Lansing smiled in the direction of John, who was straining his ears to follow this conversation.

"I don't object to your description of them," he said. "I've called them harder names myself. But you mustn't expect miracles, Lady Anne."

"Oh, but I do," she answered. "I'm always expecting them and sometimes they happen. Haven't you found that, Mr. Lansing?"

"I can't say I have," he told her with a little smile like an old man talking about fairy tales with his grand-daughter. "They don't happen over here. And they won't happen over the Neutrality Laws. The best the President can hope for from a reactionary House of Representatives is to pass some modification of the Pittman Bill this session, and that won't happen without Red Indian warfare."

"Tell me about the Pittman Bill," asked Anne, like a child eager for another story.

Mr. Lansing fell for that invitation. He liked a young woman who seemed glad to listen to him. It was a proof of her high intelligence.

"Mr. Pittman," he said slowly, "is Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee for the Senate, and he brought in a bill some little while back to revise the Neutrality Laws on a cash-and-carry basis."

"Now what does that mean?" asked Anne.

"Well, it means that in the event of war, England would be able to buy munitions from the United States by paying cash for them and carrying them back in their own ships. I dare say that doesn't sound very far-reaching to you, Lady Anne, but it means that it would be very helpful to your nation in time of war. Theoretically the Germans and Italians could buy munitions, but they wouldn't be able to

send ships to American ports with the British Navy holding the seas against them. And it means that this great country of ours is no longer indifferent to what is happening over in Europe, and that we're taking sides against the dictators and bullies. It means that American opinion is moving rapidly towards co-operation on behalf of the liberty-loving States and that our so-called idealism has some meaning to it."

"It sounds all right," said Anne. "But, of course, Mr. Lansing, I look at things from an English point of view."

"You wouldn't be natural if you didn't, Lady Anne," said Mr. Lansing.

"And from an English point of view," said Anne in her fearless way, "it doesn't seem quite good enough. What we want to know is really whether you Americans are likely to send over a million men or so to help us in time of need, if we're hard pressed in a European war. Some of your nice bombing aeroplanes might do us a lot of good."

"Anne's going too far," thought John uneasily. "Anne is certainly going to spill the beans."

Mr. Lansing took her question without blinking, but with a good-natured laugh.

"Well, now you're pressing me too hard," he answered. "Ex-President Hoover has said that if London and Paris were to be bombed from the air nothing could keep us out of the war. We should be over there, without a doubt. We should be in that fight for civilization and humanity. But that hasn't arisen yet. What is now being urged by Mr. Roosevelt and his friends is a policy of action which will break down the selfishness and indifference to world interests—which include our own—of our isolationists and ostrich-minded folk. But we don't want to be rushed into any measures which would automatically involve us in a European war. You'll have to give us time, Lady Anne. We're a long way from the European jungle. We feel—quite falsely, I'm sure—remarkably safe from your particular troubles."

Anne was prepared to give them time, but she hoped it wouldn't be a very long time.

"It's so kind of you to tell me all this," she said, turning to Mr. Lansing with a smile of great charm.

"I like telling you, Lady Anne," answered Mr. Lansing. "I regard it as a pleasure. I'm enjoying myself."

"Anne is a great little diplomat," said John to himself. "If I marry Anne, I'll go far one day. I might go as far as the White House."

Mrs. Lansing put in a laughing protest.

"Julius!" she cried from her end of the table. "You mustn't enjoy yourself too much at Lady Anne's expense. I'm sure she's heard enough of American politics at this dinner-table."

"Oh, I could never hear too much," said Anne. "It's fascinating. It's so much better than small talk, don't you think?"

It was Mrs. Vandembosch who supported Mrs. Lansing by leading the conversation into lighter and more amusing channels by a description of the World's Fair. Dr. Jonathan Lee Phillips of Yale University grasped at the first opportunity of a short monologue of his own on the comparison of the English and American systems of public education. The British Consul-General thought that conscription would have a healthy effect on the physique of English youth. The British Consul-General's wife had something to say about the Royal Family, with anecdotes on the childhood of Princess Elizabeth.

In the drawing-room Mr. Vandembosch, who hadn't had any innings, monopolized Anne for three-quarters of an hour by some historical reminiscences of Old New York, while John had a separate audience of his own, eager to hear his revelations of the European situation as he had watched it as an eye-witness in many of its capitals.

Every now and then his eyes sought out Anne's, and they exchanged secret smiles. She was doing very nicely, he thought. All this was very pleasant, and the sense of

peril had passed. Old Man Lansing was sitting on the other side of her while Mr. Vandebosch plunged deeper into the history of New York. She looked like the spirit of an English rose between those two ancients, with their parchment-skinned faces. It was a good scene, he thought, a fine subject for a painter like Robin Bramley. This room was a good background. Old Man Lansing must have made a pot of money out of the *Observer*. On his walls were several Old Masters from French and Italian galleries. On his mantelpiece was a row of English Toby jugs like the one Judy had bought at a sale. The furniture was in the old Colonial style with some priceless pieces, no doubt.

It was difficult to believe that outside was the roar and turmoil of New York—that human ant-heap rising as high as the sky, that city of dynamic energy, unceasing restlessness, and desperate struggle for unknown ends by millions of unknown lives. They were being driven by the urge of self-preservation and the fight for life into every human adventure and way, including crime, graft, patient industry, vice, virtue, and all human qualities of the soul and spirit. In tenement houses were the world's refugees. Down there in Harlem were the coloured folk. There would be a tide of traffic down Broadway with its flaming, whirling signs. Here in Mr. Lansing's drawing-room it was very quiet and old-fashioned.

"Anne," said John, when he sat with her in a taxi on the way back to Park Avenue, "you were really angelic this evening with those old people. Didn't they bore you to near death?"

"Mr. Lansing is sweet," she told him.

John thought this out for a moment. It left him at a loss for words. She was telling him the incredible and the fantastic.

He laughed very loudly down Park Avenue. In his newspaper office they had not observed the sweetness of Julius K. Lansing. If he passed on this information they would think him crazy.

XXXIII

ANNE had fallen in love with New York. She found it thrilling, she said, though just a little tiring. She liked its electric atmosphere, which she found very bracing and exciting, giving her a kind of nervous strength to resist the strain of late hours and social engagements which set her telephone bell ringing before she was out of bed and filled up her days with new adventures of exploration and discovery. She wanted to see everything, and saw most of it in company with Diana Feversham and other new friends.

Austin Crash, the best-seller, offered her his services as a guide to New York life, and took her with Diana to the pent-house on the top of the Empire State Building, from which she gazed down upon the monstrous ant-heap where the little ants rushed about, far below, all very busy for purposes unknown. Being a rich young man obtaining considerable wealth from the sale of *The Serpent's Kiss* and other works, Mr. Austin Crash was very pleased to give lunch to a lovely lady with her brother and Diana in a number of little restaurants which she found amusing because of the foreign atmosphere and strange food.

They lunched in Russian, Czech, Spanish, Italian, German and French restaurants, in streets leading out of Broadway and Fifth Avenue. They drank in Bulgarian, Norwegian, Swedish, Chinese and Fijian restaurants. They spent a long evening in Harlem, among the coloured folk, who sang to them and danced to them and were worshipped by Anne who loved them all.

Greenwich Village was delighted to meet Lady Anne Ede and her fiancé, Johnny Barton, whom they had known

some time back as a bright young fellow with the right ideas and a good newspaper man. They picnicked in artists' studios, which they found to resemble Robin's studio in Susan Street Mews off Knightsbridge. They sat on cushions eating miniature sausages late at night with young intellectuals, both male and female, who wrote poetry, novels and film scenarios, who designed frocks for the stores and scenery for the stage, who had soaring ideas if they were architects, and mystical ideas if they were artists, and very democratic, revolutionary and ardent ideas if they were politicians, as most of them were.

"This is the American counterpart of Bloomsbury," explained John in a quiet voice, and in one of those Greenwich Village studios to which he had gone rather reluctantly with Austin Crash, Diana Feversham and David Ede, on leave from Washington for an occasional week-end.

"I like it better than Bloomsbury," said Anne. "It's more amusing. It's more dynamic, don't you think?"

John had gone reluctantly because he was getting anxious about Anne's health. She was overdoing it, he thought. She was beginning to look a little nervy. She wasn't getting enough rest. He was glad that she was joining her brother in Washington the following week in an apartment which David had taken in the Wardman Park Hotel. John would be able to look after her there, at least when he could get away from his job, which was likely to be a heavy one.

He was astonished by Anne's vitality and her gaiety. American life, this New York adventure, seemed to have drawn her out and liberated her from the English reserve. Perhaps it was the contagious effect of American society, which she found so friendly, so lacking in false shyness, and so provocative of discussion.

She had a great discussion that night in Greenwich Village. It was the fault of Austin Crash, who introduced her to his friends as a lady of alarming ideas, fearless expression and infinite charm.

"She believes," he told them, "that Neville Chamberlain saved the world by the Munich Agreement and that there was no betrayal of Czechoslovakia. She denies the existence of the Cliveden House Group. She broke up a perfectly good party by saying she wanted to kiss Mr. Roosevelt."

"Gosh," said a tall young man in a painter's jacket and French trousers of corduroy, who was the owner of the studio in which he painted pictures in the school of non-objectivity, signifying nothing, but very beautiful, "that sounds very intriguing. It also sounds very dangerous."

In the studio there was a bunch of guys, as John called them privately. They were young women in short-sleeved frocks who sat on divans smoking cigarettes incessantly from paper packets of 'Camels' or 'Lucky Strikes', and eating at intervals oozy-looking sandwiches. And there were young men with the young women who sat on the floor with their backs to the wall and their hands clasped about their knees or stood at ease holding glasses of tomato-juice and gin, which they drank between spasms of oratory.

John was pleased to note the effect of Anne's appearance among them. There was a distinct sensation. Her entrance had a sense of drama. She wore a little cloak trimmed with white fur over her shoulders and a white frock with a bare back. Her very English look and her very English accent attracted them a good deal, he thought.

"Well, we don't want to have another scene," she laughed. "Don't tempt me to political discussion. Shall we talk about art?"

They were charmed to hear her talk about art, and George L. Kennaway, who painted in the style of non-objectivity, was pleased with her comments on his work.

"It doesn't seem to mean anything," she said, "but it's extraordinarily amusing. Do you paint them when you're awake or when you're asleep?"

"Lady Anne," said Kennaway, "that's the first time I've heard any intelligent remark about my work. You've got to the heart of my secret. It doesn't seem to mean anything,

you say. How profoundly true. Now most people who look at those pictures try to find a meaning in them. They say, 'Those are ships, aren't they?' or 'Are they birds or flowers?' They strain desperately to find something which isn't there. But straight away, Lady Anne, you see there's nothing there! And yet it's amusing. That is to say, it gives you some secret notion of inexplicable pleasure. You get me. That's what I'm after. And then you say, 'Do you paint them awake or asleep?' My God! That's the key to the whole thing. I paint when my eyes are awake and my soul is asleep, and liberated from the crude reaction of the material universe. I thank you, lady."

"Kennaway," said his friends, "you're a fake, and Lady Anne has found you out."

They talked considerable nonsense very earnestly for quite a time. John had heard similar talk in London studios and flats. Anne seemed to enjoy it, and the men became active in waiting on her with sandwiches, sausages and other delicacies.

An abrupt question from a melancholy-looking young man in a painter's jacket started a political discussion.

"When's that war going to happen over in Europe, Lady Anne?" he asked.

"Are you getting disappointed with the delay?" asked Anne.

The young man seemed surprised by this answer.

"Are you accusing me of blood-lust?" he asked with a smile.

"Oh no," said Anne. "But the American public have been led to believe that it was going to happen any day during the past four years. Your correspondents in Europe—apart from one named John Barton—must be getting disconcerted because their prophecies haven't come true."

The young man met her challenging eyes unflinchingly.

"Maybe that's because England keeps dodging the issue while the smaller nations get devoured by the Big Bad Wolf."

"Yes, we've been doing a bit of dodging," said Anne. "Perhaps you'd do a bit of dodging if you thought that the skyscrapers of New York were likely to fall down into Fifth Avenue under an aerial bombardment."

"What's your answer to that, Charlie Schultz?" asked Austin Crash, with his sunny smile.

Mr. Charles Schultz, one of the decorators of the World's Fair, searched his soul for an answer.

"Well, I guess we've been doing a bit of dodging too," he admitted. "I'll give you the case of Japan. But I used to hear something about a thing called honour way back in my green youth. An old phrase comes back to me: 'Death rather than dishonour!'"

"Are you accusing England of dishonour?" asked Anne, with a warning look.

"Now, Charlie," said Austin Crash, "don't you wriggle out of that. And don't be too rash in your next remark, because I'm on the side of Lady Anne Ede. She's converted me to admiration and esteem of Mr. Chamberlain. I'm going to walk down Fifth Avenue with an English umbrella as a symbol of my policy of appeasement."

"I'm never offensive to anybody's country," said Charles Schultz cautiously. "I hope my mother taught me good manners. But I can't help feeling that Mr. Chamberlain and his associates have not exhibited those bulldog qualities which we expect from the English, to whom we are proud to be related. Now take the case of Austria——"

"We'll take the case of Austria," said Anne. "Did you expect England to make war on Germany because the majority of Austrians—apart from the Jews—wanted to join up with them?"

There were little cries from some of the young women.

"Oh, Lady Anne, surely you've gotten that wrong? Wasn't it a brutal invasion with guns and tanks and bombing aeroplanes?"

"Well, you ask John," said Anne. "He was there. He knows."

John reluctantly admitted that from his personal observations the Austrians seemed to go mad with delight when the German troops marched in. Only the Jews and the Social Democrats were against the *Anschluss*, and they didn't show themselves.

"Well, take Czechoslovakia," said Charles Schultz. "Wasn't England bound to defend her frontiers? Why did she go back on France at the eleventh hour and surrender the whole box of tricks to Hitler?"

"Do they write that kind of thing in the American papers?" asked Anne. "John didn't write that from the European capitals. You can't be reading the *New York Observer*."

They liked her loyalty to John, but called for further evidence.

"We had no pledge to defend the Czechs," said Anne, "and as for letting down France, why everybody knows that her Ministers were beseeching Chamberlain to find a way of peace."

"Chamberlain was duped by Hitler," said a young woman. "I can't see how he looks his people in the face."

"One can't act in this world on the assumption that everyone is likely to perjure himself," answered Anne. "Mr. Chamberlain had reason to believe that Hitler has some faith in his own theories of racial union, and his own words that he didn't want Czechs or Poles or other breeds within the German Reich."

"It was all written down in *Mein Kampf*," said Charles Schultz. "Why didn't he read that German best-seller?"

Anne turned the tables on him. Perhaps she thought she was not on safe ground.

"Are you going to be one of the volunteers, Mr. Schultz, in the American Expeditionary Force, which we expect to march down Piccadilly when we go to war with Germany under moral pressure from Washington and Greenwich Village?"

There was a ripple of laughter. Mr. Charles Schultz

was known as one of the leading isolationists in his intellectual group.

"If I can help it, Lady Anne," he said, "there won't be any American doughboys over in Europe next time. We burnt our fingers very badly over there once before."

"Lady Anne is quite right," said one of the young women. "We can't expect England to do all the fighting and all the dying in defence of liberty and world civilization. Not even in an alliance with France. If we feel pretty mad about Hitler it's up to us to take our share. And to hell with the isolationists in this land of lovely idealism, which we hand out in gobs to our brother man beyond the seas."

The fat was in the fire. It burnt into lurid flames of argument and debate, which continued until the small hours of the morning, until John took Anne by both hands and raised her from a cushioned window-seat at an open window where she found a little air.

"You're for bed," he said sternly.

"Must we go?" she asked, like a child at her first party. "I've been having great fun."

She had been having great fun with half a dozen young men round her and the same number of young women, squatted in a circle on the floor with its imitation Persian rugs.

"Well, we've enjoyed your visit," said Kennaway, the owner of the studio. "We'll be mightily honoured if you'll come again, Lady Anne. Sure you did raise the dust in this dilapidated studio."

"I'd love to come again, if I may," said Anne.

On the way back Austin Crash, driving a powerful car with two fingers on the wheel, paid another tribute to Anne's stimulating influence upon American thought.

"You're just marvellous, Lady Anne," he said. "You just played with those intellectuals of Greenwich Village, and they loved every moment of it."

"I fell in love with all of them," said Anne. "I want to go back and have some more. Let's go back."

It was two o'clock in the morning.

"Now look here, Anne," said John. "I have a sense of responsibility. I don't want you to fade out of New York before you've reached Washington. You're losing weight. You're losing colour. It's all these late nights. It's all these time-wasting parties. What you need is sleep, and plenty of it."

During the next few days in New York, Anne went to other parties. Charlie Seligmann of the *Observer* office gave a party in her honour, and it was quite a party, which did not begin to break up until long after midnight. Mr. and Mrs. Vandembosch gave a party in Fifth Avenue, to which they were pleased to invite Mr. John Barton and Lady Anne Ede. The British Consul-General and his lady gave a small dinner and dance at which Lady Anne Ede was their chief guest. Anne had very few hours of sleep—six at the most for any one night. She needed nine—being one of that kind.

XXXIV

SHE was enchanted with Washington. She and David had a good apartment in the Wardman Park Hotel from which they set forth now and then to see a city designed by a man of genius—Pierre L'Enfant by name—and carried out by successors who had a reverence for his vision and a sense of beauty. Its noble buildings rose white under a blue sky. Its star-cut avenues converged upon the Capitol through parks and lawns already brown in the summer sun but lovely and spacious. They went for drives up the Mall and down Connecticut and Vermont Avenues. They stood on the Arlington Memorial Bridge looking towards the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. They explored the labyrinths of Rock Creek Park. They spent some educative hours in the Library of Congress, where Anne Ede turned up her ancestors. They were guided over the Capitol and the Hall of Statuary. Washington revealed its glories.

John had found himself a room in a hotel not far from the House of Representatives. He was glad to be in the same city as Anne and had telephone conversations with her from time to time, and dodged his duties as often as possible to get a glimpse of her, and even to take a meal with her. But it was a hard life for him. Mr. Julius K. Lansing, whom Anne had called 'sweet', was working him hard, sending him cables, night letters, telephone messages relating to his newspaper campaign for the revision of the Neutrality Laws. He had to interview large numbers of senators and congressmen; he had to seek an interview with Mr. Cordell Hull, and with Mr. Pittman, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. He had to work up his

brief and get his facts right—facts which were elusive and hard to find because they were constantly changing according to the mood of Congress and American public opinion. The Neutrality Bill of Mr. Pittman was merging into something else called the Gilette Blum Bill, less favourable than the original measure backed by the President. It was difficult to find out whether the President himself was going to press for new legislation that summer session, which couldn't last very well into the heat of July or the exhaustion of August. Tempers were already rising and nerves getting frayed during a prolonged session which had gone steadily against the President.

Neutrality was not being discussed on its own merits, but was being linked to the political vendetta against Mr. Roosevelt, not only by the Republicans but by the Right Wing democrats who were almost even more bitter in their attacks upon the New Deal policy and its distinguished author under whose flag they had once rallied. It was all very difficult for John Barton.

But there were compensations and pleasant moments and some honour. It was an honour to the Washington correspondent of the *New York Observer* to be invited to dinner at the White House as one of the guests in a small group which included Mr. David Ede and Lady Anne Ede. He drove with them through the park leading to old-fashioned residences which had once been burnt down by the English, as he ventured to remind her. It was not a reminder, he found, but a revelation. She had never heard of that war between England and America, and she was astonished that her ancestors had done such a thing in Washington, to say nothing of Philadelphia.

"There are great gaps in our English education," she told him. "That's one of them, evidently. Did you know anything about it, David?"

David assured her that he had heard rumours to that effect. It had happened in 1812, unless he had been misinformed by the history books.

"Well, I hardly like going to dinner with the President," said Anne. "It puts one in an awkward position, doesn't it? He may think I have incendiary bombs in my vanity bag."

She was in a gay mood, but looked a little fagged, John thought. Those New York parties had been very strenuous. She had no tremor in approaching the White House or its President, or the exuberant Mrs. Roosevelt, though John himself had what the English call 'the needle', and kept fingering his bow-tie like Edward, Prince of Wales.

"Are you going to kiss our President tonight?" he asked, to kill this sense of nervousness.

Anne laughed and tucked her hand through his arm as David's car stopped in front of the portico with its tall white pillars.

"Not unless he asks me to," she told him reassuringly.

It all went off well, and John was quickly put at ease by a host and hostess who had simple and charming manners. Anne was perfect, he thought, when she paid a little homage to the President, the hint of a curtsy, which seemed to please him. He spoke about the visit of the King and Queen which had left such pleasant memories, he said, and several times during the evening he spoke to Anne, telling her humorous anecdotes and asking about England and the spirit of the people. She pleased him by her answers and, it was evident, by her beauty and grace. For John also he had a kind word or two and thanked him for his illuminating articles from Europe, some of which he had read. He seemed to think the present tranquillity was only a lull before another storm.

Anne was pleased with her evening, and warm in her enthusiasm for Mr. Roosevelt.

Apart from the weather, which was humid, hot and very trying, Washington delighted Anne Ede, especially as she had David with her as a member of the British Embassy who had the entrée to diplomatic circles and its cosmo-

politan society. She found old friends and made new ones with great rapidity. The British Naval Attaché knew her family and had stayed at Aldermere. The British Military Attaché had been at Eton with her brother Frank. She had met one of the French diplomats in London and one of the Italian in Rome. Their wives, who, on the whole, were amusing and attractive ladies, invited her to their receptions and arranged excursion parties to Rock Creek and on the Potomac, and to other pleasant and enchanting places, to escape the heat of the city until presently some of them fled to cooler places. Those who remained abused Congress for its long session which kept them tied to Washington, but made life as pleasant as possible at swimming-pools and evening resorts where the ladies wore as few clothes as possible, sipped iced drinks incessantly, and showed their spirit by dancing, however hot it might be. In Washington they gave parties like those in New York, beginning very late in the evening and ending not long before dawn.

Anne found them too amusing to miss, and ignored John's warnings that she was keeping too hot a pace and wearing herself out with social entertainments.

"I'm enjoying it," she said. "I'm plunging deep into American life in order to become a perfectly good American wife."

That touched his heart and made him eloquent.

"Anne," he said, "what's the date of that wedding? You can't say I haven't been patient. Give me a date so that I may work towards it with faith, hope and the light of love."

She gave him a date. How would he like August 23rd?

"It is a good date," he told her; "but why not July 23rd? Nearly two months, Anne. I don't believe my patience will stand for nearly two months."

It was a question of being practical, she said. He would still be hard at work for several weeks, she supposed, until Congress decided to give up its struggles and die—or

end the session. It would be absurd for them to marry while he was away all the time running a newspaper campaign on the end of a telephone. After that she would need a little time for a trousseau. She couldn't be married in a pair of pyjamas. And she would need sea breezes and fresh air to reinvigorate her.

"I've worked it all out," she said. "August 23rd is one of my lucky days."

"Why lucky?" he asked.

"I was born on August 23rd," she told him. "I was lucky in being born. If I hadn't been born I shouldn't have come to Washington with John Barton."

"It was lucky for the world," he told her. "It was lucky for John Barton. On August 23rd I shall walk to the altar with hymns of thankfulness singing in my heart."

She held her hand out to him and spoke with tenderness.

"John, my dear, you've been a faithful knight."

He was very glad to hear those words, and taking her hands he drew her close to him.

"A knight-errant," he answered. "Always riding in search of his lady-love. Now he has found her. Now he has her in his arms. His wanderings are over."

But that night he was frightened. It was a hot night in Washington. He had been working all day on his campaign for the revision of the Neutrality Laws. It was not going well. Congressmen, sitting in their shirt-sleeves, were discussing the Gilette Blum Bill and didn't seem to like it. They didn't seem to like anything which might favour the President or be in line with his wishes. The prickly heat had affected their minds and their manners. In the smoking-rooms, thick with cigar-smoke, they sat around wiping the sweat off their brows, drinking iced water, and preparing to offer resistance to any tinkering with neutrality at this tail-end of the session. The supporters of Mr. Roosevelt and the enemies of the isolationists were getting disheartened. They were aware that underground forces were moving against them. Tempers were rising to burning

heat with the mounting of the thermometer. There were psychological storms and forked lightning was playing around the mental atmosphere.

John had to work rather late that evening getting off his message for next day's front page. He was bothered about it. The right words wouldn't come. It was darned hot in his office. He took off his jacket and presently his collar and tie, and sat before his typewriter with his braces hanging down and beads of sweat dropping from his brow to the keyboard which was wet and clammy to his touch. One of his colleagues was in a murderous mood for the same physical reasons. He kept cursing things in general, and some senator who had let him down over a story.

Anne was at a party. She had pooh-poohed John's advice to give it a miss. It was going to be rather amusing, she thought. Some of the Diplomatic Corps would be there and David had promised to take her. It was at Mrs. Gloria Hansen's house in Sixteenth Street. John had promised to look in as soon as he could. That meant changing out of his working clothes and putting on the usual kit for smart parties—a great effort after a hard working day in an atmosphere like a Turkish bath.

It was ten o'clock when he presented himself at Mrs. Hansen's house, and one minute past ten when he made his way through groups of guests sitting about the lounge rooms. Some of them were on the portico getting cool air, though it didn't do them much good because of the sultry night. The white pillars were dripping with moisture.

"Have you seen Lady Anne?" asked John of a friend who greeted him with a "Hullo, John. You're looking cool. How do you manage it?"

His friend, who was one of the secretaries in the White House, smiled at this question.

"You'll find her! She has all the best-looking men round her."

John found her by that clue. She was standing in Mrs. Hansen's drawing-room in her white frock puffed out like

a crinoline. A soft light from the candelabra played on her lovely shoulders and touched her fair hair. She was in a gay mood, and her eyes were shining as she talked with a group of distinguished-looking young men.

"Say, Lady Anne," said one of them, "how is it that this climate doesn't seem to get you down? You look as if you were in the chill breezes of your British Isle."

John thought she looked a little pale, but that may have been the effect of the electric light. He thought she looked exquisite as usual, especially when she caught sight of him and sent him a smile.

"Hullo, John. You must be tired!"

"No," he said. "I feel refreshed at seeing you. Keeping cool?"

"Melting away," she told him.

One of the junior members of the Diplomatic Corps spoke to her in his own tongue, which was Italian, and she answered very fluently in that musical language, to the admiration of her friends.

"You're marvellous, Lady Anne," said one of them. "Do you speak all the dialects of Europe? Wasn't it German a minute ago?"

"Oh, I'm not much of a linguist," said Anne modestly. "Only French, German and bad Italian."

"I want to tell you a little story I heard today," said a young man from the National Library of Congress, who had shown her some of his treasures. "It's a peach of a story."

He began to tell it, and Anne listened with a little smile about her lips.

But suddenly she put one hand to her forehead and the smile left her lips.

"John," she said, "I feel——"

He moved towards her with sudden anxiety.

"I feel a little——"

She felt a little faint it seemed. She fainted. John was not quick enough to hold her. She fell on to the floor with its polished parquet before anyone could save her.

There was a rush towards her, but it was John who carried her to a long couch where he laid her down.

"For God's sake!" he said. "Is there a doctor here?"

It was not serious, said the doctor, when they had taken her back to the Wardman Park Hotel. It was just the humid heat. But she had been overdoing it. Too many parties. Too many late hours. Burning herself out. It was only her spirit which had kept her up so long.

"She will have to go away somewhere with cooling breezes. The Connecticut coast."

"Sorry, John," said Anne, fondling his hand as she lay in bed. "I'll be well by August 23rd. Too many parties."

She laughed with this admission that his advice to cut out parties had been quite right after all.

It was the Fevershams who rose to the occasion. They had taken a house for August and September on Long Island Sound. It was a very healthy spot. They would be delighted to have Anne as their guest again. They would give her a good time. They would look after her like guardian angels until she went to her wedding with John Barton.

He saw her off one morning from Washington. There were others who came to see her off bringing flowers and books for her journey. She had made many friends.

"It's worth while having fainted like that," she told them. "You have all been such dears to me."

She kissed John without shyness and he was envied by his friends.

"Not long now," she whispered. "I shall be waiting for you."

There were still nearly two months. To John they seemed like twenty years, and every day a year. He was desolate when she went away from Washington, leaving him to his work.

XXXV

JOHN's campaign against the Neutrality Laws ended in something much resembling failure, not by any fault of his.

The House of Representatives passed a modification of the Blum Bill, revising those laws but revising them only by a hair's breadth. The President had asked them to withdraw the automatic embargo on the sale of munitions to countries involved in war against the aggression of dictator States. Mr. Secretary Hull had pleaded with their leaders, emphasizing the urgent need of such legislation in view of the increasing menace in Europe. Their ambassadors abroad had sent alarming dispatches. There was a week-end when war was expected momentarily. The American Embassy in Brussels more particularly had sent very grave messages suggesting an immediate explosion over Danzig and the Polish Corridor. If Congress had any vision of foreign affairs they would surely meet the President's wishes.

Congress refused to meet the President's wishes. The isolationists had all the trump cards because a majority in Congress were more concerned to disappoint the President and turn down any of his wishes whatsoever than to revise the Neutrality Laws against which they had no strong feeling, believing indeed that if it came to war they would be repealed anyhow in double quick time. The Act on the Statute Book forbade the sale of arms, munitions and instruments of war. The Blum Bill, now passed, forbade the first two only but allowed the last, thereby suggesting that instruments, such as aeroplanes, could be sold to France and England if they had the cash to pay for them and the ships to carry them.

Not much of a concession, but just something! It was a miserable and, as John thought, a cowardly compromise. It was another slap in the face to Mr. Roosevelt by men who hated his New Deal, and had resolved to kill his chance of a third term at all costs and by all men. It was not, thought John, any expression of American policy on foreign affairs in league with the great body of public opinion moving strongly towards assistance to Great Britain and France, but another revelation of the passions aroused by this personal partisanship for or against the President himself.

"Well, Barton," said his chief, Mr. Lansing, over the long-distance telephone, "we've lost out this time."

"It looks like that," said John.

"You did fine work," said Mr. Lansing. "I'm not blaming you. Your pieces in the paper made good reading and converted not a few, believe me. I hear that in the clubs and among my friends."

"That's nice of you, Mr. Lansing," said John. "And now I suppose I've earned a rest."

There was a slight silence over the telephone, followed by a dry laugh.

"Newspaper men don't rest, Barton. Have I ever rested? I want you to get off tonight to Kansas City and make that your headquarters for some articles on Middle West opinion on American foreign policy and home affairs. I want you to test out the feeling on the President in certain cross sections."

"Now look, Mr. Lansing," said John. "I'm going to be married to Anne on August 23rd. I want to see something of Lady Anne. I want a rest. I want to be happy."

"That's all right, Barton," said Mr. Lansing. "I'll let you off before August 23rd. Time enough then to be happy. You're a newspaper man, and don't forget it. I pay your wages and don't forget that."

"Now look, Mr. Lansing," cried John in a desperate voice.

"Give my regards to Lady Anne," said his chief, "and be off tonight to Kansas City."

He rang off, leaving John Barton in a state of rage and despair.

"She called him sweet," said John Barton in the telephone box at his office in Washington. "She called that old devil 'sweet'. That's Anne's kind heart. She's the kindest heart in the world. She thinks Old Man Lansing as sweet as candy. That's her charity. Or perhaps she misread that Torquemada, that torturer, that American slave-driver, that old bag of bones without any bowels, that ancient son of a—— Well, I suppose I'll have to go to Kansas City."

He went to Kansas City and other places in the Middle West. It ate up more than a month of his young life.

Anne joined him in New York half-way through August. She was looking splendid and quite restored in health. She was busy buying her wedding trousseau with the help of Diana Feversham, who was to be one of her bridesmaids.

XXXVI

IN England the relatives and friends of John Barton and Anne Ede were getting a little worried half-way through August. The international situation was darkening, they thought. Some very unpleasant rumours were coming from over in Danzig, Warsaw and other places in Central Europe—rumours reaching those whose business or interest it was to watch such things, but not as yet troubling the general public, who were in a holiday mood. The newspapers, with unusual regard for human happiness, allowed them to enjoy this holiday mood, especially when the sun shone bright and warm after an incredibly bad summer which had outlived England's worst reputation. They kept the bad news and black rumours out of their headlines. The picture papers were filled with snapshots of happy seaside crowds and bathing beauties.

The purveyors of 'inside information' were less gloomy than usual. Things were going well in Moscow for the proposed Anglo-Russian Pact, slowly still, but surely. There was a French and British military mission in the Soviet capital talking to the Russian generals and experts. Those talks were likely to lead to the political understanding which would bring Russia into the Peace Front against any further aggression on the part of Germany. A book by a Hungarian named Lajos was very reassuring and having a great sale in many countries including Hungary itself. Germany could not win, said this knowledgeable author, if Germany made war against the democracies.

The English people, not great readers in the mass, were not worrying about foreign affairs. They were building sand-castles for their children on many beaches. They were

strolling on seaside piers listening to bright music and getting sunburnt.

Sometimes in the sky, it is true, there were reminders of that shadow of menace behind the sunlight over Europe. There was a lot of aerial activity and the constant drone of engines over rural England and some of its cities, especially at night when there were little lights among the stars. Some of the boys were up there practising night flying. But it was reassuring. England was getting strong in the air. Germany would be taking notes of that.

And the boys of twenty-one who had been called up for military service, and great numbers of Territorials, were in camp having a hard time, but keeping their spirits up according to the old tradition. They had been washed out of many of their camps by the heavy rains ; they had taken it with laughter for the most part. They were getting hardened and tough to the wind and the rain. They were all very cheerful according to report. England's nerves were steady despite stories in the German papers that England was still panic-stricken and a land of jitters.

The people of England in the mass had forgotten the German menace for a time. They had put it out of their minds. Optimism was the note of the newspapers, though spoilt now and then by young gentlemen in the B.B.C., who would have their little bit of gloom.

Dr. Goebbels, that insatiable propagandist, had announced the beginning of a new battle of nerves. It was in full swing apparently in the *Völkischer Beobachter* and other German papers with terrifying names, which held no terror for the linguistic talent of the B.B.C. It was being run against Poland with a full blast of abuse and threats of violence and stories of Polish atrocities against the Germans in their midst.

Dr. Goebbels had gone out of his way to answer some English correspondents who were sending friendly letters into Germany. His answers were in the style of a gutter-snipe putting his fingers to his nose and yelling out derisive

and vulgar words. If he wished to rattle the nerves of the English people he failed completely for quite a time. They refused to be rattled. They were fed up with all that nonsense. They were having a good time with their kids. . . .

Half-way through August certain people in England, in Whitehall, in London clubs, in editorial chairs, and in quiet houses where their friends gathered now and then for private conversation, began to get a little worried. One of them was John Barton's friend, Langdon, the novelist. Another was John Barton's brother-in-law, Robin Bramley.

It was Langdon who started worrying, being a man of that temperament, and very sensitive to the world's vibrations.

"I don't like the look of things," he told Bramley, who had come in one night from the house in St. Leonard's Terrace three doors away, where he lived with Judy, his wife.

Bramley, sitting in one of his leather chairs in the study upstairs, with a glass of whisky by his side, raised his eyebrows and smiled with his humorous lips.

"No? Isn't all quiet on the Western Front? Judy and I aren't worrying. We are still very amused with each other."

"The Germans are launching a campaign of abuse against Poland," said Langdon, standing in front of his empty fire-place. "They're increasing their demands. They're now talking about the Polish Corridor and Silesia in addition to Danzig. And the moving masses of men. The whole nation is in arms and ready for war. I don't like the look of it, Bramley, my dear fellow."

Robin Bramley tried to give a brighter touch to the picture.

"It's Chinese warfare of the old style. Making faces to frighten the enemy, beating gongs. Moving masses of men one way and then moving them another. The battle of nerves."

"I heard some queer stuff at the club yesterday," said Langdon. "I met a friend just back from Moscow, where he had been with our mission. He doesn't have much confidence in that proposed pact. That fellow Molotoff is a tricky customer. He received our representatives with a kind of jeering insolence and kept them hanging about week after week without the slightest attempt to make progress towards an understanding. He's playing a crooked game, possibly with Germany. Frightful, isn't it?"

"Not too good," said Bramley. "It will be rather awkward for Mr. Chamberlain's Peace Front if Russia rats therefrom. How are we going to defend Poland then? In the words of my organ-grinder of Susan Street Mews, 'Ask me another'."

"They tried to force us into giving them the right of occupying the Baltic States for defensive purposes," said Langdon. "It was an impossible suggestion. Criminal. How can we deal with those blood-stained ruffians whom our Liberal and Socialist friends want us to respect and honour?"

Bramley laughed at this passionate question.

"Another of life's little ironies. And still another will be a serious interruption of my future work if another crisis happens and I'm called up to drill a brave battalion of new recruits and get them ready for the dear old trenches. Fortune is within my grasp. I've been asked to do the frescoes in a Hall of Peace at Pittsburgh. Judy pulled a few strings. I should be able to keep her, instead of getting board and lodging in my mother-in-law's house."

Langdon ignored these personal considerations depending upon peace.

"You say if another crisis happens," he remarked. "It's happening now, Bramley. It's moving towards its climax."

"Oh, not yet!" said Bramley. "Give it a week or two, dear fellow. I'm playing golf with Judy at Weybridge next Saturday. Don't let it happen before then. Please."

He saw that Langdon was slightly annoyed by this levity, which he had meant to be amusing, and he spoke more seriously.

"Excuse my habitual flippancy. It's only a mask for secret apprehensions which I thrust back because I hate to think of them."

He rose from his chair and walked to a bookshelf as though interested in one of the volumes and then turned round and revealed himself with angry words.

"Oh, my God!" he said. "How long is this going on—this nagging tension—this constant threat to peace—this interference with one's hopes and happiness? Sometimes I think a war would almost be better. We can't live while that man Hitler is alive in the world. Judy and I are having a good time together. Why should that damned and perjured villain spoil our game of life?"

"I'm not thinking of myself," said Langdon, as though in slight rebuke of this egotism. "I'm thinking of Paul and all the other Pauls and the children who play in London gardens and all the youth and beauty of the world. I've tried to save them. I go on trying to work for peace. A conspiracy for peace. How futile! How hopeless!"

"It's still worth trying," said Robin good-naturedly. "The dreamers may win. How's the book going?"

"I'm writing it as an anodyne," said Langdon. "I work at it as though it might save the world. My so-called conspirators are having strange adventures."

He laughed at the thought of those characters who were at work on a secret campaign of peace in his fairy tale. They had induced American metal and Canadian mine-owners to impose a private embargo upon the minerals essential for hard steel, so that Japan and Germany were being starved of raw material for their instruments of death. They were working a radio station in a neutral State jamming out the propaganda of the war-mongers and filling the ether with words of peace, calling to the peoples to refuse to march against their fellow men across the

frontiers. They were in touch with their fellow intellectuals and idealists in many countries, who swore allegiance to this conspiracy against the dictators. The plot was going well, though utterly different from his usual style.

He had given an outline of it to Robin, who was rather struck by it. He referred to it now.

"If Hitler gave us time we might get that plot going in real life."

Langdon's eyes brightened.

"I've been playing with that idea. All over the world there are men eager to join a crusade like that—the men who believe in liberty and intelligence, men who hate violence. We might get together. We might do something."

Robin moved towards the door.

"I must be going. Judy and her mother will be back from the Edes'."

That reminded him of something.

"By the way, I had a letter from Anne. She and John are going to get married towards the end of August. They're taking an apartment in New York."

"That's good news," said Langdon. "I must write to John Barton again. I miss him more than I can say."

XXXVII

JUDY was getting anxious, though she hid this shadow on her mind from Robin and her mother until the evening after a visit from the Countess of Munstead, whom she had learnt to call Vera. That strange and beautiful lady had given a rat-tat-tat at the door of the little old house in St. Leonard's Terrace at four in the afternoon, when Judy was alone in her drawing-room. Her mother had gone out to the American Women's Club, and Robin was busy in his studio.

She was surprised when Vera was shown into the room by Mrs. Pockett. It was the first time she had seen her since the honeymoon at this lady's old place in Sussex, where Judy and Robin had ridden her horses and walked out with her dogs and gathered flowers in her garden and sat at her dining-table and slept in a four-poster bed.

"Well, darling," she cried, "I thought I must take a peep at you just to see that Robin had not broken your heart yet."

"My heart," laughed Judy, "is still intact. In fact, I think it's slightly enlarged. Do love and happiness enlarge one's heart?"

Vera professed to be ignorant about that. Love had deluded her, she said, though she was fond of her soldier husband in a decent, comradely way. Happiness had eluded her, though she made the right kind of face to life now and then.

"How did you like that ghost-ridden manse in Sussex?" she inquired, as she flung her white gloves on to Judy's sofa and took off her coquettish little hat.

Judy explained at some length how much she had liked

that house of ghosts. They must have been nice ghosts, because they left good vibrations. She had loved every nook and cranny. She had been enchanted with the gardens so trim between the yew hedges, with so many velvet lawns and so many little arbours, and the pool of lilies and the paddocks and the little winding path by the stream, and the fishpond with its ancient inhabitants and the dove-cot and a thousand delights to an American girl who had never before stayed in such an English house and garden, except once at Aldermere with Anne's family.

Half-way through this ecstasy of remembrance she saw that Vera's thoughts were straying.

"Sorry," said Vera. "I'm glad you two dears had such a good time. I'm rather afraid it may be your last good time in England. If I were you, Judy, I would hop it back to the States and take Robin with you while there's time."

"Time for what?" asked Judy, looking startled.

"Time for life and time for love," said Vera. "It doesn't matter for me, of course. I'm fixed here. I'm going to be one of England's heroines. I don't care a damn, anyway. They say women can't say boo to a goose or a mouse. I'll show them I'll say boo to all the bombs of Germany."

"What are you talking about?" asked Judy, staring at her. "You frightened me once before, you know. It was last September, before the crisis."

"I've come to frighten you again," said Vera, Countess of Munstead. "I like you too much not to warn you in time to get out while the going's good. For Robin's sake—you know I loved him once."

Judy could not help going just a little pale. She had been reading unpleasant things in some of the English papers but she hadn't spoken to Robin about them. He preferred to keep off all talk about the international situation. He said it spoilt his sense of humour.

"I'm not talking through my hat," said Vera, who had thrown her hat—an early-Victorian looking thing—into one

of the arm-chairs. "I get it from my husband, who isn't an alarmist. He's one of those cold, calm Englishmen who never turns a hair, poor old dear. He says the War Office is shortening its odds against war, or rather betting on the other horse. Two weeks ago they were six to four against. Now they're six to four on."

"Isn't that a queer way of putting it?" asked Judy, with a nervous laugh.

Vera smiled for a moment.

"It's their way of putting it."

"Why all this foreboding?" asked Judy. "Aren't you exaggerating again? Isn't it just newspaper talk again?"

"It's coming this time," said her friend—she was now her friend. "Hitler has made up his mind to smash the Poles and we're committed up to the neck—Chamberlain is a very brave old gentleman. Jack, who is a soldier, wants to know how are we going to defend the Poles."

"There's Russia," said Judy hopefully. "The Russians are very strong. Haven't they enormous numbers of men and the biggest Air Force in the world?"

Vera gave a little laugh.

"Those beautiful Bolsheviks, beloved by our Labour Party and all my Left Wing friends, are playing rather a double game. Jack has heard from one of his military friends in Moscow and is getting—well, Jack told me in confidence."

She said no more about that, as though she ought not to reveal her husband's secrets even to Judy.

"We're going to be up against it this time, Judy. There won't be another Munich at the fifty-ninth tick of the eleventh hour, I fear. Our little friend Adolf, with the toothbrush moustache, is seeing visions again. The Devil is whispering in his ear and offering him world domination. It's very tempting to the poor man and the end of it will be very unpleasant for all of us. Jack says we have just about another week, so if you have any shopping to do or any little arrangements to make you'll have to be quick."

Tell Robin to book two berths at minimum rates on any boat leaving for New York."

"No," said Judy; "that's out of the question. Robin won't go like that. I'm staying with Robin. I'm English now."

"Very well, dear," said Vera, as though tired of this subject. "Have it your own way. If we have to die, as most of us will, let's be merry and bright about it. It's all very amusing really if one looks at it in the right way. Man—what a funny animal! Life with all its illusions—what a queer dream! Yes, two lumps of sugar, please. And what a pretty tea-set."

Judy was upset after this strange conversation. She mentioned it to Robin when he came back and for a moment he too looked rather vexed, though he tried to turn it off with a laugh.

"That woman," he said, "she ought to be scragged, frightening you like that, Judy—to say nothing of frightening a poor little lad like me, so very nervous, so very easily alarmed."

"Robin," said Judy, "is it coming nearer? Is it the September crisis all over again?"

"It looks like it," he said seriously. "And I don't see how we're going to get over it this time. Chamberlain has tied us up. If the Poles decide to fight we shall have to make brave faces and die like little gentlemen for a point of honour. It's all very unsettling."

He put his arms round Judy and kissed her ear.

"I'm getting fed up with Adolf," he said. "We shall have to give him a thick ear. Otherwise he makes the world intolerable."

Their private conversation on serious subjects was interrupted by Mrs. Barton, who came in brightly with some small parcels after shopping in the King's Road.

"Well, my dears," she said, "I hope I'm not intruding unduly."

"It's your house, ma'am," answered Robin politely. "I'm the intruder."

"You're a darling," said Mrs. Barton, "and I love having you here. But I don't like to see you looking like Hamlet in one of his black moods. What's the trouble, Judy? That news in the papers?"

She looked sharply from one to the other with her shrewd smiling eyes.

"How did you guess?" asked Judy.

Mrs. Barton was pleased at guessing right.

"Oh, everybody's talking about it. The greengrocer in King's Road said he was fed up with the Germans and thought England would have to fight now or become a German province. He was all for fighting, although I don't think he would look much of a soldier if he put on uniform. His waist measurement is somewhat large for his height, and I should say he's well over sixty."

Judy smiled at this little mother whose cheerfulness was proof against all rumours of war.

"You don't seem to be worrying, mother," she remarked.

"I'm not worrying," said Mrs. Barton. "The stars are on the side of Peace. All the astrologists are agreed that this crisis is going to be smoothed out."

"Very reassuring," agreed Robin, with a little wink in the direction of Judy. "How about a spot of table-turning? The spirits were remarkably favourable to world peace last time we tried."

Judy thought him shameless in the way he pushed the table.

XXXVIII

THE holiday time in Europe was sadly interrupted by that sudden awakening to a sense of danger and a smell of burning. It was difficult to know why the alarm suddenly became acute. Someone behind the scenes must have given a signal or passed a word that the peoples could no longer be kept lulled by a false sense of security because the sun was shining and the children were digging sand castles. The voices of broadcast announcers altered their theme from gay to grave. The news they recited was more ominous. It dwelt more lengthily with the campaign of fury in the German Press which for a week or two they had toned down or ignored. Danzig, Danzig, Danzig—that Free City became the centre of world interest. What was happening there might set fire to all the explosive forces of the European arsenals.

The curtain was drawn from a stage set for scenes of war. German troops were massing in East Prussia, moving down to Slovakia, concentrating along the Polish Corridor, lining the Hungarian frontier, manning the Siegfried Line. Germany was mobilizing reserves, commandeering lorries, trade vehicles, petrol and all supplies. They were placing heavy orders in all the world's markets for rubber, oil, wool and metals, and their orders were being accepted and delivered by traders in the interests of good business and nice profits who knew that they were for no good or amiable purpose in regard to their own folk and nation, though nobody seemed to get angry about it.

The Prime Minister of England returned from a fishing holiday. Perhaps that was the signal for alarm. After all, when a man gives up a fishing holiday after a year of ceaseless work, something must be very serious. He did

not disguise from his House of Commons that the situation was grave, though not in his opinion hopeless. The Left Opposition thought he wanted watching. They proposed to remain in session for the purpose of watching him and nagging at him with awkward questions about the protracted delays in signing the alliance with Soviet Russia, that noble country which has the interests of humanity at heart and had pledged its word to resist aggressor nations. The leader of the Liberal Party had uttered simple but affecting words. "We must all learn to respect Soviet Russia," he said in his resonant voice.

The House of Commons was adjourned reluctantly but with the promise that if the situation appeared to take a turn for the worse it was to be recalled, as the watch-dog of the nation.

"That's all right," said the optimistic man in the street. "As long as Parliament is not sitting, there's no need of worry. Anyhow, we're all prepared. To hell with Hitler!"

Mr. Hitler, not hearing the voice of the Englishman in the street, was resting at his mountain fastness in Berchtesgaden. He was resting in preparation for the usual September Rally at Nuremburg which he had called the Peace Rally, in token of his love of humanity. But now and again he kept in touch with his generals, his Air Force commanders, his admirals and executive chiefs.

Some of his faithful followers were not resting. They were not enjoying a German holiday in beer-gardens and pleasant places. That most industrious man Herr von Ribbentrop was still working over his maps and his secret reports from the German ambassadors abroad. He was working at one little job of a very confidential character. It had been a tricky business, but it was going nicely. It went so well in its last stages that he was able to reveal its happy conclusion to his master at Berchtesgaden and to the German nation and the world.

Germany, by the industry and diplomatic genius of Herr von Ribbentrop, once a traveller for an inferior brand of

champagne, had arranged a non-aggression pact with Soviet Russia. A fast aeroplane was ready to take the German Foreign Secretary to Moscow to sign that document with that great lover of humanity, Mr. Stalin, the uncrowned Czar of all the Soviet States.

For years Hitler and his friends had denounced Soviet Russia as Public Enemy Number One. The central dogma of the Nazi creed, proclaimed by Adolf Hitler, its founder and prophet, had been hatred, loathing and fear of Russian Communism. They had justified their revolution by the claim that it had saved Europe from Bolshevism and that Germany was the strong bulwark against its black tide, which otherwise would swamp the world with anarchy. They had been the leaders of the Anti-Comintern Pact which had been signed by Japan and Italy and other nations equally hostile to Russia and Russian methods of revolution. Because of Hitler's hatred of Communism he had sent his air pilots into Spain to bomb Republican cities and massacre the women and children of Spanish Marxists, because of his hatred of Communism he had subordinated German interests in China to the Japanese alliance against the Comintern. In many speeches which had strained his voice for seven years, Adolf Hitler had shouted and screamed out his loathing, his hatred, his fury against Jewish Communism, Marxian Jewry, the world conspiracy led by Russia and Russian Jews to overthrow civilization. Thousands of Germans suspected of leanings towards this gospel of the Left had been flung into concentration camps and prisons. He had abused England and France for their criminal weakness in allowing the curse of Communism to creep into their strongholds and to undermine their mentality.

Now he gave his blessing to Herr von Ribbentrop for having arranged this alliance with Soviet Russia, which would enable him to deal with the Poles without a fear of war on two fronts. Perhaps Germany and Russia together would partition Poland again.

In Moscow Mr. Molotoff, in charge of foreign affairs for his master Stalin, signed this treaty of alliance with that nation which had been denounced in Russia a million times, in the speeches of Russian leaders, in the official Press and at all Party meetings. Many Russian generals had been shot in the back of the head for conversations with the German Headquarters Staff. Perhaps Stalin had seen one day that there was really much in common between the Nazi creed and Bolshevism. A pact with Germany would liberate Russian troops for the coming war with Japan.

There were some English gentlemen in Moscow. Mr. Molotoff smiled when he thought of how he had kept them on a string for several months while keeping in touch with Herr von Ribbentrop. They had been very patient. They had gone sightseeing in the Kremlin between meetings in which no progress happened. Not daunted by the failure of a political pact, the Governments of France and England had sent out a joint military mission to discuss plans in case of war by Germany. They had revealed, no doubt, some very interesting information on the subject of aeroplanes, tanks and expeditionary forces. It would be very useful for Herr von Ribbentrop, with whom, when he arrived by aeroplane, Mr. Molotoff shook hands very cordially.

In the Kremlin of Moscow, Germany and Russia betrayed their honour. It was a very great betrayal on both sides, but in the game of power politics there is no honour, and no faith, for it is a dirty game, conducted by ruthless men, cold-blooded and cold-minded, who have abandoned all codes which once belonged to Christian ethics and civilized morality.

It was the betrayal of their own creeds, their own hatreds and their own words. They were exposed to the world as liars, perjurers and hypocrites, and a shiver shook the minds of all honest men.

XXXIX

"JOHN," said Anne one evening in New York, "I'm getting rather worried about affairs in Europe. They're boiling up again, aren't they?"

He had gone round to the Plaza Hotel where she was staying with Diana. It was ten days before the date of their wedding. Her room was littered with cardboard boxes in which lay her wedding trousseau. Diana was with her, helping to tidy things in the big bedroom strewn with tissue paper from some of those boxes. On the table was a glass vase holding the bouquet of roses which John had sent her that morning as usual.

He had tried to keep the news from Anne, and he minimized its gravity now. But secretly he had been getting anxious. The European correspondents to New York papers were sending over some grim messages. They expected war within a week or two. And he had had a letter from Peter Langdon, his English friend. It was a tragic and mournful letter. Langdon seemed to have given up all hope of peace. He was agonizing over the new crisis because of his own son and all the young manhood of England who would have to fight if Poland were attacked.

Our honour is deeply committed this time [he wrote]. Chamberlain hasn't given us a loophole for escape without our loss of honour. The extraordinary thing is that England is utterly calm and steady. The ordinary people in shops and buses and so on either don't realize, or else have made up their minds to the great ordeal. I confess I am staggered by their courage and by their fatalism. There is something noble about it. But I think Hitler has made them angry. They can't see the use of any peace as long as that man is allowed to live. I confess I don't take that view.

To my mind almost anything is better than war. You will remind me of honour. Yes, I have not lost all sense of honour, but does it lead us to sacrificing millions of men in Europe in order to fulfil a pledge of the Poles which personally I think should not have been made without weighing up all the chances and all the forces against us? Shall we save the Poles if we declare war upon Germany? . . . I know this will be called a defeatist point of view. And I know that I'm almost alone in holding it. At least there is no expression of that view from the people of England or France.

Paul argues with me. He thinks it is our bounden duty to fight for Poland. Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps I am cowardly. It will comfort you, anyhow, to know that there are not many people like me. As far as I can tell, Mr. Chamberlain had the whole nation and Empire behind him in this grim resolution. There is, of course, still a chance that Hitler may agree to negotiation of some kind. I have not abandoned all hope. I pray for a peaceful solution.

John had not mentioned this letter to Anne. He had not told her about other messages reaching him from England, or brought up the international situation in their private conversations. But others had brought it up. He could not keep her in an ivory tower.

"I don't think it will lead to anything enormously serious," he told her lightly. "May I see some of those frocks?"

She stood fingering one of those frocks, a filmy gauzy thing lying in its cardboard box.

"John," she said again, "I'm getting frightened. It was something Austin Crash told me at lunch today. He says that England may be at war with Germany in less than a week."

"In less than a week!" exclaimed John, laughing uneasily. "What a fool that man is! Why does he talk like that? I'll have to stop his mouth."

"Diana," said Anne, turning to her friend, "I want to talk to John a little privately. Do you mind?"

"Of course not," said Diana. "I'll wait for you at the dinner-table. Only don't have a quarrel before your

wedding. Don't forget I'm chief bridesmaid, and I want a smiling bride."

Anne waited until she had gone out of the room. She was holding her filmy frock, but suddenly let it drop to the floor.

"John," she said, "I'm going home. I'm going to England."

His heart stood still for a second.

"No," he cried. "For God's sake, Anne! We're going to get married."

"Not now," she told him. "There's no time. John, I'm panic-stricken. I must get back to my own people. If there's war I must be with them. I always said so. You've been keeping things back from me."

"Now, girlic," said John, "stay steady. If there's war it's not going to help any if you rush back to England. Your family will be happier if they know you're nice and safe over here with a kind husband. Be reasonable, Anne. And be loyal, my dear."

Those last words caught her attention though she was hardly listening to him, but staring across the room as though she saw beyond its walls.

"I want to be loyal to you," she said. "You've been loyal to me, John. But I must be loyal to England, too. I must be loyal to everything I am in my blood and in my spirit. I couldn't stay here having lunches with amusing people, going to parties, lolling about on golden sands, having our honeymoon, if London is being bombed and English people being killed. I simply couldn't, John. I should go mad. I should be like a caged thing."

"But our love," he pleaded, "don't you value that? The time we're going to have together. Sure you're looking forward to it."

"I shouldn't be happy," said Anne. "Love in idleness. What's the good of that when Europe goes up in flames?"

John got hold of her arms and held them in a tight grip.

"Forget Europe," he said. "To hell with that mad-

house inhabited by maniacs. Over here there's peace. It's going to be safe in New York where I've hired an apartment for you. Our honeymoon need not be spoilt because Adolf Hitler has a brainstorm. I'm not going to let you go, Anne. I'm going to hold you tight. You shan't escape from me this time."

He tried to kiss her, but she pushed him away with real strength which surprised him.

"John," she said, "I'm serious. I'll marry you tonight. I'll marry you tomorrow morning. I'll marry you on board ship. But I want you to get busy now and get me a boat for England. I was a fool not to read the papers. You ought to have told me, John."

"My dearest dear," said John, "I'm tied hand and foot. Old Lansing wants me over here. He offered me a fine job in the New York office after our honeymoon. It's a great chance. It puts me easy in my mind about the future."

Anne laughed in a way that hurt him a little.

"All that's absurd," she said. "Are you afraid of coming with me? Would you rather stay here in safety?"

For a moment he was stricken.

"Now, Anne," he said reproachfully, "that's not fair. That's not English. I feel my heart bleeding."

Suddenly she burst into tears, holding her hands out to him.

"I'm sorry, John. Please forgive me. But I feel caught in a trap. All these silly frocks. All these ridiculous undies, my long white veil, what will they mean if London is being bombed and if all my friends are lying dead in the ruins?"

John held her again.

"Say, Anne," he said, laughing at her, "that's a morbid picture. That's going too far and too quick. You're having a fit of horrors. No, I'll see what I can do about it."

He saw what he could do about it by going round to the office and striding down the passage towards Mr. Lansing's room.

"Hullo, Johnny," said Charlie Seligmann, who was

coming out of the Chief's room. "I thought you were off for your honeymoon quite soon. You look as if you were suing for divorce. Nothing like that, I guess?"

"You've guessed right," said John.

He went into Mr. Lansing's room and stood for a moment while that old gentleman finished writing a sentence on a cable form. He looked up with a start.

"That you, Barton? I was just going to send a message for you. There's something I want to say to you."

"Mr. Lansing," said John with suppressed emotion, "I want to say something——"

Mr. Lansing didn't let him say it.

"I know it will be a disappointment to you, Barton, to postpone your wedding date."

"Say, Mr. Lansing——" cried John with desperation.

Mr. Lansing interrupted him:

"And that it'll be a disappointment I've no doubt either to the very charming young lady who was going to share that pleasure with you on the date arranged."

"Now, look, Mr. Lansing——" said John grimly.

Mr. Lansing made a slight gesture with his cigar familiar to his staff.

"If you'll allow me to do any talking," he said, "I want to tell you that I'm sorry to make an alteration of plan. But this is a newspaper office and not a matrimonial agency. I'm sending you to Europe, where the situation is getting red-hot, according to the cables. I've booked a berth for you on the boat sailing next Thursday. You arrive about time for the declaration of war which seems likely according to my information. Give my regards to Lady Anne, won't you? Tell her that I'm glad she's staying on this side. Mrs. Lansing and I will be happy to do anything we can for her while you're watching Armageddon."

He rose slightly in his chair and held out his hand.

"Good luck, Barton. Take care of yourself."

John Barton surprised him by the announcement that he would want a double cabin. Anne was going with him.

XL

JOHN had married Anne the night before sailing. It had been quick work at last and there was no one present at the ceremony except David Ede, who had flown back from Florida, and Diana Feversham.

They had a spacious stateroom in an empty boat. Few Americans were crossing to Europe by that trip. They were crowding the boats in the opposite direction, having been advised to leave Europe by the American Ambassador and Consul after a message from Mr. Cordell Hull.

It was a smooth sea and perfect weather. At night a hard moon looked down on the great waters and night world surrounding them.

"How peaceful it seems," said Anne, leaning over the rail with a little cloak round her shoulders.

"Yes," said John. "It's hard to think that millions of men are on the move in Europe, like soldier ants."

"I wonder what God thinks of it all?" asked Anne.

John was doubtful about that, though not irreligious.

"I guess it makes Him vexed," he said, after a little thought.

They had many conversations like that. They were getting to understand each other. That empty ship was a very good place for two souls to get nearer to each other with understanding.

They seemed to be lost between two worlds on this great stretch of sea. The American dream had faded. Europe was still a long way off. They were drifting into space aloof from human struggles, fears, agonies and hatreds.

But news came to them from time to time over the

wireless. The King of the Belgians had called a conference of the neutral States. He had made a plea for peace. The Pope had broadcast a message of peace from the Vatican City. President Roosevelt had made a fervent appeal to Mussolini and suggested three ways of escape from war if Hitler was a reasonable man.

"He isn't reasonable," said John, commenting on that. "But I'm glad Roosevelt has spoken for the United States. Our Neutrality Laws will go bust if England and France are involved in war."

"I hope so," said Anne. "I hope you'll come in quick this time."

"Don't you worry about that," said John. "We're coming in mighty quick, though the people don't know it yet."

On another night Anne spoke quiet words which moved John to some emotion.

"You're very brave, John. It would have been so easy for you to stay in New York instead of sailing as hard as you can to the danger zone with a girl who's going to be a nuisance to you."

"I'm glad you call me brave," said John. "I'd hate to say it isn't true. But who's the girl that's going to be a nuisance to me? And did she think that her knight-errant would run away from the dragon when his lady-love was going forth into its very jaws?"

"All the same," said Anne, "I don't see why I should drag you into the fiery furnace."

So they talked, these two, as the engines of a great ship throbbed beneath them and drove them steadily towards an unknown adventure in which death might lurk.

They laughed now and then. They made little jokes to each other. They danced on a lonely floor. They forgot now and then the menace of things.

And other souls like them in England and France and Germany and Italy and other countries of Europe laughed a little, made little jokes to each other and forgot, or tried to

forget, the menace of things, though it was creeping up to them so close that one night they darkened their windows and looked up into the sky and waited for the bats of death.

A great prayer went up to the invisible God of peace and mercy, from countless millions of men and women who knew that if war came there would be no more laughter in the world and no more beauty and no good things of life while it lasted, nor even perhaps when it was ended.

The fate of humanity hung in the balance, and the scales quivered.

The scales were weighted down by the forces of Evil. One man alone wanted his war before he was too old to enjoy it. A group of men who were his accomplices, flatterers, and evil counsellors share with him for ever the foul crime of leading their nation against its will—except for the folly of youth duped by hero-worship and fed on lies—into this dark adventure which would cause the slaughter of millions of men, women, and children, and the ruin of all hopes. Poland was invaded with a ruthlessness and ferocity of armed might against which no heroism could stand.

They were heroic, those Poles. As long as history lasts that tale of horror and sacrifice will be remembered. In a way it was mad, that desperate and futile resistance to overwhelming odds. The Polish leaders must have known that in saying "No" to Hitler when he demanded Danzig and the Corridor they had no chance at all against those mechanized columns of great armies supported by vast squadrons of bombing 'planes. It was mad, but in spirit magnificent, though the price of heroism was the annihilation of towns and villages, amidst the ruins of which lay the mutilated bodies of women and children who had more victims than the soldiers.

England and France could not give any rescue to the Poles.

History will always ask whether that Pact by which they guaranteed the integrity of Poland was not a tragic error. But it is now proved that Hitler never intended to restrict his claims to Danzig and the Polish Corridor. He lied over that as he has lied over everything. It is proved by his brutal partition of Poland with Soviet Russia. And by this alliance with that nation which he had denounced for six years as the most evil power in the world he proved himself false in every fibre of his being, in every word he had ever uttered, in every action by which he had attained his power. He had persecuted millions of Jews because many of them were Communists. He had sent his airmen to Spain to fight Communism. He had proclaimed that Germany was the bulwark of Europe against the black tide of Bolshevism. Now he opened the gates to these allies and sent his ambassadors to grasp the bloody hand of Stalin.

In England the mood was grim and resolute. There was no cheering or flag-waving as in the last war, when youth rallied to what they thought was a great and gay adventure, knowing nothing about modern warfare. London came to look like a besieged city. Darkness impenetrable blacked it out by night. Because of the menace from the air a Pied Piper called away its children by the sound of an air-raid siren, and the great city was desolate without them and family life was broken up. But it was a strange war during that first month. People looked up at the sky, wonderfully blue and beautiful in those September days, and asked, "When are they coming?" The bombing 'planes did not come. There was a strange truce in the skies. For England the war had hardly begun, though thirty days had passed, except for the sinking of ships and a few raids over Germany by the boys with wings, mostly unattacked. A strange war! The strangest in history perhaps. Hitler was ignoring the Western Front as far as he dared until he had finished with Poland.

He had finished when Warsaw fell and Polish peasants

stood amidst the ruins searching for their dead. What next, Hitler?

He wanted peace. He offered peace with a threat. And for a little while there was in some French and English minds the tempting thought: Can we not have peace before war begins for us? Would it not be better to accept the murder of Poland—no crime of ours—and come to terms with those two dictators, rather than lose the flower of manhood and risk all ruin and suffer the full horrors of a long war? For a moment or two that tempting thought whispered in some minds, to whom war is abhorrent, only to be rejected by the soul of the people. No such peace seemed possible. One does not make peace with the spirit of evil let loose upon the world. All liberties were challenged. All decencies had been violated. The grim ordeal would have to be faced, unless it was Hitler who surrendered, or other Governments who arranged and guaranteed a decent peace, which would be no victory for him.

"We shall have to go through with it, John," said one of the characters in this book. It was Anne, the wife of John Barton.

"Before the end my people will be with you," he said.

THE END

